ACADEMY EXCHANGE №9:

THE POSTGRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

WIDENING PARTICIPATION / THE RESEARCH STUDENT EXPERIENCE / THE SPEED PHD / DISCIPLINE PERSPECTIVES / THE BOLOGNA PROCESS / GRADUATE JUNCTION / WHO OWNS THE DOCTORATE? / COMMUNITY MATTERS / THE SCOTTISH RESEARCH EXPERIENCE / DOCTORAL EMPLOYABILITY / PTES / THE MBA STUDENT EXPERIENCE / BEYOND THE PHD / QUALITY ASSURANCE AND POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH / PREPARING FUTURE ACADEMICS / SUPERVISING POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN AN AUDIT CULTURE / TEACHING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The Higher Education Academy

ACADEMY
EXCHANGE
No. 9

EDITORIAL
by CHRIS PARK

Just over ten years ago, Professor Bob Burgess noted that "Postgraduate education and training has been a feature of UK universities throughout the 20th century. However, postgraduate work has often been 'bolted on' to existing activities." (Burgess, Band and Pole 1998 p.145). This is no longer the case, and postgraduate education is now firmly embedded as a mainstream activity in most UK higher education institutions (HEIs). Much has changed over the past decade, including the significant growth in the number of postgraduate students, the internationalisation of postgraduate recruitment, the development of graduate schools, the emergence of new forms of doctoral awards, the growing importance of skills development activities in research degree programmes, and continued interest in assuring the quality and standard of postgraduate awards.

Perhaps the most obvious indicator that postgraduate education has been mainstreamed, and its strategic importance recognised, is the Postgraduate Review commissioned by Lord Mandelson and led by Professor Adrian Smith (Director General of Science and Research at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills). This is the first major national review since 1996, when the *Review of Postgraduate Education* chaired by Martin Harris was published.

Adrian Smith's recently-published report – *One step beyond: Making the most of postgraduate education* – makes recommendations in a number of key areas, including identifying and promoting the value of postgraduate education, better promotion of postgraduate study within

and beyond the UK, further development of postgraduate experience surveys, and extending postgraduate research funding and training. In the area of employability, it suggests developing core competencies for employment and establishing employer needs for postgraduate skills.

It also recommends identifying how and where to fund relevant provision, embedding transferable skills training in postgraduate research programmes, collecting appropriate information to inform policy decisions on widening access to postgraduate study, quality assurance of flexible postgraduate provision delivered partly in the workplace or by more than one HEI, making sure that Masters level courses are compliant with the Bologna process through the use of credits and learning outcomes, and considering how to link future funding of research degrees more explicitly to research quality rather than volume as at present.

The Harris Report led, amongst other things, to the sustained growth in postgraduate numbers and a much greater diversification of postgraduate opportunities, on both taught and research programmes. The Smith Report is likely to have equally significant and enduring impacts on postgraduate education in the UK.

We might not be at a tipping-point in postgraduate education in the UK, but may be approaching a cross-roads and we should certainly expect to see some major changes in the years ahead. This seems like a particularly opportune time to reflect on where we are on that journey, and to that end this issue of *Academy Exchange* focuses on postgraduate education. It is a sign, both of the times and of the growing reach and engagement of the Academy, that the Academy – generally better known across the sector for its work in undergraduate education – can play its part in reviewing and championing postgraduate education in the UK.

The articles in this issue (which were written before the Smith review was published) are designed to illustrate something of the vibrancy and adaptability of postgraduate education in the UK, and they were commissioned from practitioners with first-hand experience of what they have written about. They cover both taught and research programmes, and they address four key and in many ways inter-related themes – recruitment, quality and standard of awards, the student experience, and employability. Where relevant, we have added information from the review in a box at the end of the articles.

The postgraduate population in UK HEIs has grown significantly over the last decade, and this trend looks set to continue. Universities like postgraduate activities; they are a mark of academic credibility, they boost interna-

tional reputation and brand, and they bring in substantial sums of money. There is great growth potential too, because – unlike with undergraduate students – there is no cap on fees, and no limit on how many an institution can have. Students have many different motivations for postgraduate study, as the PTES and PRES results show (see the box on page 15). Mary Stuart explores the factors that inform decisions by widening participation students to undertake postgraduate study, and Janette Ryan outlines some key issues for international students studying on postgraduate programmes in the UK. Aspects of supply and demand in taught MA programmes in English are considered by Samantha Smith.

The quality and standards of academic awards in the UK are generally valued internationally, and Pam Denicolo outlines the implications and expectations of the Bologna process for postgraduate education in the UK. A key role in assuring and enhancing quality and standards is played by the QAA and its Academic Infrastructure, and Janet Bohrer sets into context the current evaluation of the Academic Infrastructure, asking does it remain fully fit for purpose? Janet also sketches out a QAA project on 'doctorateness', which grew directly out of the Academy project Redefining the doctorate, which in turn prompted my own article on *Who owns the doctorate?* Imelda Whelehan takes a more practical approach in reflecting on the audit culture and how it impacts on the day-to-day reality of academic life and postgraduate study.

Recent years have seen a significant growth of interest in all aspects of the student learning experience, and a number of the articles focus on this. The Academy's two online survey tools PTES (the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey), and PRES (the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey), throw valuable light on how students rate different dimensions of their experiences, at both the sector level and within institutions. This new intelligence is being used to inform enhancement initiatives, particularly centred upon the sense of isolation that many research students feel. Debbie McVitty outlines a valuable project being undertaken by the NUS which is exploring ways of helping research students feel better integrated into the research culture of their department/school. Elizabeth Chapman Hoult describes what she learned about resilience whilst undertaking her PhD, Alison Kennell reflects on her experiences as an MBA student, and Susan Turrell (a Bioscience student award winner) outlines how her thinking about future careers changed through the course of her doctoral programme. Induction is an important stage in helping research students to feel and become integrated, and the 'Speed PhD' outlined by Tony Bromley is

an interesting and effective approach to helping in this area. Daniel Colgate describes Graduate Junction, an online academic network for early career researchers. A series of strategic collaborative initiatives are being developed by Scottish HEIs, designed to support the development of research students, as outlined by Rachel Adamson.

Employability is high on the Government's agenda for higher education, and HEIs now provide postgraduate students with a range of opportunities for skills, professional and personal development. Janet Metcalfe describes the progress that has been made in the doctoral skills agenda and emphasises the challenges that remain. Getting students to actively engage with what is on offer remains a major challenge. Clare Saunders and Julie Closs outline some approaches to postgraduate training in Philosophical and Religious Studies. For research students with ambitions to remain in the academy, programmes like the University of York's Preparing Future Academics, outlined by Karen Clegg, are becoming increasingly important. For all research students, having access to information about possible career routes and options is vital, and the career profile approach developed by Beyond the PhD, which is described by Catherine Reynolds and David Stanbury, is an online resource that students appreciate.

Postgraduate education in the UK is in healthy shape – student demand for postgraduate programmes remains buoyant, institutions remain committed to developing their postgraduate portfolios, there is growing awareness of the need to enhance the postgraduate student experience, and employers value the maturity, competencies and attitudes of graduates with higher degrees (taught and research). It would be interesting to revisit many of these themes in five years time, to reflect on "what happened next".
— *Chris Park, April 2010*

FURTHER INFORMATION

Burgess, R.B., Band, S. and Pole, C.J. (1998) Developments in postgraduate education and training in the UK. *European Journal of Education* 33 (2): 145–160

One step beyond: Making the most of postgraduate education (2010), Adrian Smith *et al:* www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/docs/p/10-704-one-step-beyond-postgraduate-education.pdf

Guest editor PROFESSOR CHRIS PARK was Director of the Lancaster University Graduate School, 2001–09. He is now a higher education consultant.

FOCUS

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ACADEMY'S RECENT WORK

REVIEW OF UK PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FRAMEWORK UNDERWAY

During 2010 the Academy will be undertaking a review of the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). This work is being carried out by Professor Sue Law, Director of Academic Practice. Professor Law said:

"After four years of operation, and given the rapidly changing teaching and learning context within higher education, we believe the time is right to take this review forward. We have already encouraged Vice-Chancellors and senior colleagues in institutions to offer their views on any strategic issues and their input will be very helpful in framing the consultation. We shall then, of course, wish to consult more widely with colleagues in the sector over the coming months."

The UKPSF was developed by the Academy on behalf of the sector. The review is designed to build on the successes of the current scheme, while ensuring that opportunities to further develop and enhance the broader professional recognition scheme are identified. Professor Law added:

"We are keen to ensure that the UKPSF is very well placed to address issues raised in the sector and by Government. It is important

that we work closely with institutions to enhance opportunities for colleagues in a variety of professional roles to gain recognition for excellence in relation to teaching, learning support, and academic practice."

www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/supportingindividuals/professionalrecognition

REWARD AND RECOGNITION OF TEACHING

In December the Academy published the second report from its reward and recognition of teaching in higher education project, a collaboration with the University of Leicester's GENIE Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL).

The report found that teaching performance is not consistently included in the promotion criteria for academics at UK universities and colleges, and is often completely absent. Despite the vital role that teaching plays in a student's experience of university, it is research performance that is emphasised in most HEI promotion policies.

The report recommends that funding should be made available to carry out work on defining and developing criteria for recognising quality in teaching and quality in the student experience. These criteria should be appropriate to diverse institutional missions and include examples of good practice from the UK and overseas. It also recommends that universities and colleges should scrupulously apply the criteria and methods to all levels of academic positions.

The first report, published in February 2009, looked at academics' perceptions of how teaching is rewarded and recognised in higher education. Findings from the second phase of the study are consistent with the findings in the first.

www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/supportingresearch/rewardandrecog

POSTGRADUATE REVIEW

The value of the Academy's postgraduate research experience survey (PRES) and postgraduate taught experience survey (PTES) is highlighted in the recently-published *One step beyond: Making the most of postgraduate education*. The review, commissioned by Lord Mandelson and led by Professor Adrian Smith,

considers the benefits of a postgraduate education for the economy, employers, the higher education sector and individuals.

Sean Mackney, the Academy's Acting Chief Executive, commented:

> "Large numbers of higher education institutions are using PRES and finding it valuable in enhancing the quality of the postgraduate research experience. We look forward to even more HEIs benefitting from taking part in the survey.

> "This report recognises that the needs of postgraduate students may be different from those of undergraduates and recognises the increase in numbers in non-EU postgraduate students. The Academy's Teaching International Students project focuses on the ways that lecturers and other teaching staff can meet the diverse learning needs of international students in ways that benefit all students.

> "We recognise the report's interest in making postgraduate opportunities available to people from a wide range of backgrounds, and have funded research that examines this, such as the work by Professor Mary Stuart published in 2008.

> "Postgraduate learning in the workplace is of growing importance as part of higher education's more flexible provision, and as the report mentions, the Academy will be disseminating practical examples of how HEIs tackle quality assurance challenges of employer-responsive provision later in the year."

www.heacademy.ac.uk/news/detail/brown_report

RESEARCH REPORT PUBLISHED ON INCLUSIVE POLICY AND PRACTICE IN UK HIGHER EDUCATION

Published in January 2010, the Academy's new research report, *Developing and embedding inclusive policy and practice in higher education*, found that effective and inclusive cultural change will require institutions to focus not only on enhancing their policy and processes, but also on working with individual staff to encourage positive attitudes and practices.

Over the course of 14 months the Academy conducted research to explore the experiences of ten institutional teams as they developed and embedded an aspect of disability equality or widening participation. It found that team members became champions for the change process within their institutions and worked with many stakeholders to effect change across the whole institution. Students were found to be vital to this process, and their experiences and input helped to convince staff of the need to change.

One of the report's authors, Dr Helen May, Senior Adviser for the Academy, said:

> "Inclusion needs to be treated as a mainstream issue. This means policy and practices need to move away from supporting specific student groups, towards those that are embedded across institutions and part of ongoing quality enhancement for all students. The report makes clear recommendations which could help all UK institutions to benefit from the experiences of those who participated."

www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/york/documents/ourwork/inclusion/developingembeddinginclusivepolicypractice_reportfinal.pdf

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

In November 2009 we started working with the National Union of Students (NUS) on a joint project, funded by HEFCE, which will support institutions and students' unions in England to better engage students in shaping their learning experiences and will provide them with the materials and space to discuss and improve how they engage students.

As part of this project our subject centres will consider student engagement in the disciplines, and we will continue to work with student groups, such as the Student Learning and Teaching Network, to ensure that the student voice is represented.

Over the next few months we will be developing the evidence base to demonstrate the benefits of student engagement. We will be collating relevant literature and collecting examples of effective practice which can be shared across the sector.

www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/universitiesandcolleges/studentengagement

COMPUTER-AIDED LEARNING PACKAGE A SUCCESS

A project funded by our Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine Subject Centre (MEDEV) has gained national approval from the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.

The EMS driving licence is an online computer-aided learning package which prepares veterinary students for extramural studies (EMS), which they undertake during a 26-week clinical placement. The package will now be rolled out to all UK veterinary schools to ensure that all students are properly prepared for their placements.

The learning package addresses a range of issues, from confidentiality and professionalism, to working on clinical cases and going out on calls.

Evaluation of the project showed that students who had completed the learning package prior to their placements felt better prepared, were more likely to set learning objectives and felt more able to deal with difficult situations.

www.medev.ac.uk/resources/funded_projects/show_mini_project?reference_number=435

ECONOMICS NETWORK LAUNCHES STUDENT FOCUS GROUP SCHEME

The Academy's Economics Network has launched a student focus group scheme to help economics departments tackle issues highlighted by surveys such as the National Student Survey and its own biennial survey of economic students.

Allocated on a first-come, first-served basis, the student focus groups will be set up to discuss in-depth some of the learning and assessment issues raised in these surveys.

The groups will involve up to 15 students, drawn from a range of students within participating departments. They will be run by independent evaluators who will return a confidential report to the department for use in planning.

A total of 11 universities from England, Scotland and Wales are taking part in the scheme, addressing issues including assessment and feedback, student engagement, and teaching and learning.

www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/projects/surveys/focus_group

ACADEMY ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2010

The Academy's Annual Conference 2010, which will take place from 22–23 June at the University of Hertfordshire, will discuss the theme of 'Shaping the future, exploring impacts and changes to the student learning experience over the next five years'.

Delegates will be able to choose from over 100 paper presentations and workshops which are focused around the four conference tracks: future staff; future students; future partners and policy, and future learning.

Our keynote speech will be given by Professor Calie Pistorius, Vice-Chancellor at the University of Hull, and this year we are also holding a Question Time-style discussion panel around the theme of quality and standards in higher education. The panel will be chaired by journalist and broadcaster, Mike Baker, and includes Bahram Bekhradnia, Director of HEPI; Lizzi Holman, Senior Policy Adviser from the CBI; Aaron Porter, Vice President (Higher Education), NUS; Professor Dianne Willcocks, outgoing Vice-Chancellor, York St John University, and Phil Willis, former MP for Harrogate and Knaresborough.

To find out more about this year's conference, and to book your place at the event, visit the website.

www.heacademy.ac.uk/eventsandnetworking/annualconference

FORENSIC CAREERS WEBSITE LAUNCHED

The Academy's UK Physical Sciences Centre has launched a website that gives information for current and potential forensic science students in the UK on possible future career opportunities. It provides information on what forensic science is and details the different sectors within forensic science.

The Centre funded Professor Julie Mennell, then of Teesside University now of Northumbria University, to develop the website through its annual development project grants scheme, which provides support for academics wishing to develop and disseminate good, innovative teaching practices or to improve the quality of learning, teaching or assessment in the physical sciences.

www.heacademy.ac.uk/forensic_careers

DESIGNING AN INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM

Work is progressing on our 'Designing an Inclusive Curriculum in Higher Education' (DICHE) project. Recent developmental work with a range of institutions resulted in our inclusion team defining the features that are necessary in an inclusive curriculum. Lancaster University is now using this definition to bring together examples of how inclusive curricula have been developed.

The resulting guidance will offer universities and colleges in the UK a range of practical ways to embed the requirements of the equality legislation within the design of the curriculum, within different subject disciplines.

Dr Helen May, Senior Adviser at the Higher Education Academy, said: "All students, whatever their individual learning entitlements, should have access to the best possible higher education learning experience, and the design of the curriculum is arguably a key way of addressing equality legislative requirements.

"Universities and colleges currently have little advice available to them on curriculum design and our project with Lancaster University will provide them with examples of how to make the curriculum more inclusive. We're looking forward to publishing this guidance later in the year."

www.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/detail/inclusion/inclusion_curriculumdesign_0910

HLST AND THE OLYMPIC GAMES

The Academy's Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism (HLST) Network has set up an Olympics special interest group (SIG), providing a forum for sharing ideas, information, resources and good practice, enabling us to capitalise on the opportunities the 2012 Olympiad brings. It is designed to explore opportunities to engage both tutors and students to enhance student learning opportunities and experiences, and to raise the profile of the HLST subjects.

A website is being launched which includes case studies, discussion starters and other resources to capitalise on the opportunities which the Olympics and Paralympics bring to enhance curricula. HLST has also established a memorandum of understanding with colleagues in Vancouver who have been engaged in similar work regarding the 2010 Winter Games to share resources that they have developed.

Current activities also include workshops organised by SIG members at different universities around the UK, a student conference on the relevance of Olympic and Paralympic values, a special issue of our HLST periodical LINK, and a conference in November 2010.
www.heacademy.ac.uk/hlst/ourwork/olympics_sig

STUDENT-LED AWARDS LAUNCHED IN SCOTLAND

The Academy has launched a joint pilot project with NUS Scotland to encourage student-led learning and teaching awards at universities across Scotland. The project will support eight students' associations in recognising lecturers that demonstrate excellence in teaching and learning..

Alastair Robertson, the Academy's Head of Policy and Partnerships, Scotland said:

"We are delighted to support this pilot project in conjunction with NUS Scotland. There is a lot of debate in higher education about the recognition and reward of excellence in learning and teaching. Recent research published by the Academy shows a gap between how teaching is recognised by comparison with research in higher education institutions. It is great to see students doing something really positive to celebrate the excellent lecturers the Scottish sector is fortunate to have."

Liam Burns, President of NUS Scotland said:

"It is incredible the difference which can be made to a student's life by a lecturer who is willing to go above and beyond. Scotland has some of the best academics in the world and it is about time we started shouting about it."

The universities taking part in the pilot project are: Edinburgh Napier University; Heriot-Watt University; University of Edinburgh; University of Strathclyde; University of Abertay, Dundee; University of the West of Scotland; UHI Millennium Institute; Glasgow Caledonian University.
www.heacademy.ac.uk/news/detail/2010/scotland_student_led_awards

HIGHER AMBITIONS

In November 2009 the Academy responded to Higher Ambitions, the Government's framework for the future of higher education in England. The report was wide-ranging and referenced the Academy's work in enhancing the quality of the student learning experience and in the professionalisation of teaching, as well as its support for subject communities in graduate employment issues.

Commenting on the framework, Sean Mackney said:

"The emphasis in the framework on the student experience is welcome. The Higher Education Academy suports the aims of helping students make more informed choices and have a greater say in shaping their higher education. Better student engagement leads to a higher quality student learning experience. It also makes it more likely that when they have started at university or college, students will stay and complete thier courses."

However, the Academy has urged caution about going to far down the route of treating students as customers. Sean Mackney added:

"Higher education is a partnership between students, tutors and their universities and colleges. The Academy is supporting higher education institutions in increasing student input into the curriculum. We miss a great opportunity if we reduce higher education to a simple client model."

RETENTION CONVENTION SUCCESS

Over 145 delegates from across the UK attended our retention convention in March, organised with Action on Access. The event drew on the student retention and success programme initiated and funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and HEFCE. The keynote presentation was given by Dr Helen May and Professor Liz Thomas, senior advisers for the Academy, who gave an overview of a range of projects to enhance student retention, their common outcomes, and the necessary steps to help share the findings across the sector. Professor Thomas said:

"A series of projects, which are being led by English universities, have been commissioned to evaluate the impact of a range of interventions designed to enable students from different target groups to remain in higher education. But student success is a complex issue, and this conference helped to share the experiences of seven projects as they work to improve student retention, and to share learning from other institutions across the sector."

Professor Thomas will be speaking at the fifth annual student retention and progression conference in London.
www.heacademy.ac.uk/events/detail/2010/retention_conference_2010

NEWS FROM SCOTLAND, WALES AND NORTHERN IRELAND

SCOTLAND. The Scottish Higher Education Employability Network (SHEEN), which the Academy partners, has received funding to support Scottish institutions in implementing, monitoring and evaluating their employability strategies. The funding is worth £150,000 over three years.

Our event on rethinking assessment practice around feedback in January was very successful and addressed issues including strategy and evidence around assessment, action planning for change, strategic issues, the National Student Survey and staff/student dialogue around feedback. Forthcoming events on the Higher Education Achievement Report in Scotland and plagiarism have also attracted wide audiences, underlining the significant interest across the sector in these important areas.

The Academy is running a pilot project on student-led teaching awards in partnership with NUS Scotland, involving eight institutions and their student associations. This one-year project, which began in September 2009, also aims to create resource materials to support other interested institutions to run similar schemes.
www.heacademy.ac.uk/scotland

WALES. The Academy has been invited by the Welsh Funding Council (HEFCW) to lead a steering group which will plan a conference to celebrate learning

and teaching in Wales. The conference will take place during the 2010–11 academic year.

In October 2009 we published a report which reviewed the widening access strategies that Welsh higher education institutions used between 2006–07 and 2008–09. The review informed the HE sector in Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government on progress in widening access. It will also contribute to HEFCW's strategy to widen participation and access to higher education. A joint HEFCW-Academy event on retention is taking place on 12 May 2010.

October also saw the publication of the *First year student experience Wales: a practice guide.* Leading on from this report we will be working with the first-year experience group in Wales.

The Academy's work in Wales aligns with the priorities set out in the Welsh Assembly Government's new strategy paper *For Our Future: The 21st Century Higher Education Strategy and Plan for Wales*, which was published in November 2009. The report identified two fundamental priorities for higher education in Wales: delivering social justice; and supporting a buoyant economy.

www.heacademy.ac.uk/wales

NORTHERN IRELAND. In the autumn term of 2009, the Academy began chairing the learning expert group in Northern Ireland, one of the five expert groups contributing to the development of a higher education strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020.

The Academy is currently working to progress the Institutional Partnerships Programme (IPP) visits in Northern Ireland.

www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/supportingpolicy/nations/northernIreland

TEN YEARS OF THE NTFS

The National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) is ten years-old this year. Since its inception, over 350 individuals have been recognised for their excellence in teaching and learning in England and Northern Ireland.

Professor Sue Law, the Academy's Director of Academic Practice, comments:

> "In many ways, the impressive work undertaken by our National Teaching Fellows has helped to transform the student learning experience, both in their own institutions and in the way it has inspired other colleagues from across a range of institutions and disciplines."

More recently, the NTFS has funded cross-institutional projects, each of which has benefitted from the input and expertise of a National Teaching Fellow.

www.ntfs.ac.uk

Clockwise from top: Arti Kumar, Peter Wiegold, Phillip Plowden, Rayya Ghul, and Elizabeth Warr.

WIDENING PARTICIPATION

MARY STUART ASKS WHAT AFFECTS
WIDENING PARTICIPATION STUDENTS' DECISIONS
TO PROGRESS TO POSTGRADUATE STUDY

¶ A great deal of attention has been paid to widening access for first cycle (undergraduate) higher education students in the UK over the last ten years. We are now beginning to see some early signs of success (see HEFCE, January, 2010), but what about carrying on further to postgraduate study? It appears that very little research has been done to examine the composition of the postgraduate community in the UK looking at social divisions (except see Wakeling, 2005, 2009).

Postgraduate education has blossomed in the UK but this has not really been because of UK students undertaking postgraduate qualifications – the growth has come largely from the significant increase in international students attracted to UK HE (HEPI, 2010), which raises further concerns about who is actually undertaking postgraduate study, research-based or taught, in UK institutions. Any HE manager interested in the diversity and mix of their provision and their student body will want to get some sense of trends in postgraduate study and the decisions that graduates are taking in relation to further study. Equally there are questions about the impact these choices have on graduates' future career prospects.

In other words, is the issue about equity in higher education shifting from undergraduate study to postgraduate study? As more students undertake undergraduate studies, some students may be using postgraduate study as an important way of distinguishing themselves from others in the labour market. These issues have fascinated me for many years. As someone whose research has always focused on social divisions and their impact on individual people's lives, and as a manager in a university this area of research seems vital.

As a result in 2006, with the support of the Academy, I undertook a piece of research which explored some of these questions. Based on a survey of 1073 final year undergraduates at two different institutions I explored with my team of researchers (Michelle Morgan, Lucy Solomon, Catherine Lido and Karen Akroyd) what decisions students were taking about their futures and why they made these choices. There is a strong sociological literature on decision-making in HE, (see Reay *et al*, 2005) but mostly focused on undergraduate choices and this research project is still relatively unusual in the UK.

Most of the findings from the research indicated that students based their decisions on their perceptions of their position in the employment market. They are making what they think are rational choices about

their best prospects for future jobs. This will lead students who have undertaken 'academic' qualifications at undergraduate level to seek further postgraduate study while those who have undertaken 'vocational' courses are more likely to seek employment. Many felt that they wanted to get out into the workplace quickly to use the knowledge they had gained at undergraduate level, giving them a break from study which they found stressful and personally challenging.

They also felt that employers would value work experience more than further study. Several believed they would return to gain further qualifications in the future, possibly paid for by their employer. This expectation may well have implications for HEIs as they develop their plans for employer engagement. On the other hand students on theoretical courses felt a postgraduate qualification would give them an 'edge' in the workplace after they had completed their course. Career prospects were important to all interviewees, whether they had gone on to postgraduate study or not.

However it was also very clear from the analysis that international students, including students from the European mainland, were more likely than UK students to indicate a desire to continue to postgraduate study, which is of course backed up by the overall statistics for postgraduate study in the UK (HEPI, 2010). There were no main effects of age groups, occupational class, or actual debt on the students' intentions to undertake postgraduate study.

Many students who did not intend to go on to postgraduate study indicated that they did not wish to do so because they wanted a break from study. This is understandable given that most of these students had been in education for 16 years. However what was surprising was the extent to which participants in this research indicated that they felt that studying was particularly stressful and that they suffered from considerable anxiety while in higher education.

There were differences between class and reported family HE experience, but class alone was not a sufficient factor in affecting intentions to undertake postgraduate study. However when family experience of higher education was combined with class there was clearly an effect present. Students who had family members who had had experience of HE themselves were more likely to see postgraduate study as important for their futures, whether immediately or in the future. These students were also better informed about opportunities for support for postgraduate study.

Financial concerns underpinned much of the decision making for these students but especially worry about debt

rather than debt itself played a significant role. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds were more likely to aspire to undertake postgraduate study but experienced more worry about additional debt which seemed to create a barrier for them. In the survey the participants indicated that financial decision-making was risky and that they had little support to help them with their choices.

Clearly these are the results of only one survey, but they do indicate that there are issues that the sector needs to examine further. Postgraduate education is finally coming under the spotlight, but given the findings from this research it is clear that the decision making process for students is not clear cut and I do hope that as we examine the postgraduate experience over the next few years we do not ignore questions of social divisions, family background and how students make choices about their future.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) (2010) Postgraduate Education in the United Kingdom HEPI Report summary, 45

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Wakeling, P. (2009). Are ethnic minorities underrepresented in UK postgraduate study? *Higher Education Quarterly*, 63(1), 86–111.

Wakeling, P. (2005) La noblesse d'état anglaise? Social class and progression to postgraduate study. *British Journal of Sociology of Education.* 26 (4), 505–522.

Higher Education Policy Institiute (HEPI): www.hepi.ac.uk

PROFESSOR MARY STUART
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The Smith Report (para 27) recommends that a high-level working group be set up "to advise on what additional information should be collected about postgraduates to inform future policy decisions on widening access to postgraduate study."

THE RESEARCH STUDENT EXPERIENCE

CHRIS PARK ON WHAT THE RESULTS FROM THE POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH EXPERIENCE SURVEY REVEAL AND WHERE ENHANCEMENT INITIATIVES SHOULD BE DIRECTED

PRES (the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey) is an online survey tool designed to collect feedback from current postgraduate research students in a systematic, user-friendly and comparative way. The main objective is to help HEIs to enhance the quality of their postgraduate research degree provision, informed by evidence-based decision-making. It is *not* a student satisfaction survey; it offers HEIs an opportunity to find out what research students think about their experiences, and the ability to benchmark their students' views against the national aggregate and against the views of students in particular mission groups through Benchmarking clubs.

Informed by the results of pilot testing in 2006, PRES first ran nationally in 2007, and surveys have also been carried out in 2008 and 2009. Participation in PRES is purely optional, for both HEIs and research students, but uptake has been good – 82 HEIs (half the sector) took part in 2009, with 18,644 respondents (a response rate of 28.6%).

For the first time in the UK, it is now possible to compare students' views on their learning experiences at undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research postgraduate levels. In November 2009 the Academy published an overview report (*The Research Student Experience: Lessons from PRES*) which collates results from the three PRES surveys and reviews them alongside results from the 2009 National Student Survey (NSS) of final year undergraduates, the 2009 Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), and results from its Australian precursor the Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ). The report also considers the PRES results in the light of QAA expectations (articulated in the *Code of practice*) and findings (of the 2006 review of research degree programmes).

Overall, the PRES findings show that research students have generally very positive views about their experiences. Key findings include:

a. Overall satisfaction levels for research students are very high; four out of five rated their experience as having met or exceeded expectations, and the proportion has increased slightly each year. This is similar to the satisfaction levels shown by undergraduate students and taught postgraduates, and to Australian research students.

b. Opportunities to develop research and transferable skills were the areas in which research students' expectations were met or exceeded the most.

c. More than two-thirds of research students agreed that they were confident about completing on schedule, and that proportion has also increased slightly each year.

d. Within supervision, students were most positive about their supervisors' skills and subject knowledge. UK and Australian research students had very similar levels of agreement on questions about supervision.

e. Research students also had very positive views about the infrastructure to support their work, particularly about provision of library facilities, access to necessary equipment, and provision of computing resources and facilities. Overall levels of agreement were slightly lower than for undergraduates, taught postgraduates and Australian research students.

f. Research students had generally positive views on goals and standards, with more than two-thirds agreeing that they understood the standard of work expected, the required standards for the thesis, and the requirements and deadlines for formal progress monitoring. Australian research students had much more positive views about goals and standards than their UK peers.

g. The research students who were able to answer the questions in PRES on thesis examination had generally very positive views, particularly on the fairness and timescale of the examination process. Australian research students had slightly more positive views on thesis examination than UK research students.

h. Research students' views on skills development were among the most positive of all the responses to questions within PRES, with more than two-thirds agreeing with most questions. The most positive views were about improving their ability to learn independently and improving analytical skills. Two out of three agreed that they had adequate opportunities to further develop their research and transferable skills; this proportion rose more between 2007 and 2009 than other items. UK research students had similar views on skills development to the taught postgraduates, but their views were less positive than their Australian counterparts.

i. Fewer than half of the research students agreed that they were encouraged to reflect on their professional development needs, and a little over a third agreed that they were encouraged to think about the range of career opportunities available to them or to reflect on their career development needs. There are no comparable questions in the NSS or PREQ, but more than two-thirds of taught postgraduate students who took part in PTES agreed that they were encouraged to reflect on their professional development needs.

While the PRES findings are generally positive, they also highlight areas for further consideration, both within individual HEIs and across the sector. These include:

a. Encouraging and supporting supervisors to provide research students with more effective guidance on selecting and refining their research topic (supervision);

b. Increasing the availability of financial support for research student activities (infrastructure);

c. Providing more effective means of integrating research students into their department or faculty, and reducing their sense of isolation and marginalisation (intellectual climate);

d. Providing research students with more and better information on institutional standards and expectations (goals and standards), including institutional responsibilities towards research students (roles and responsibilities);

e. Providing research students with more and better information about the nature of the examination process (goals and standards), particularly the role of the viva (thesis examination);

f. Introducing more transparent and effective systems for gathering and responding to feedback from research students (roles and responsibilities);

g. Providing research students with more and better information on who they can approach if they are dissatisfied with any elements of their research degree programme (roles and responsibilities);

h. Increasing the availability of opportunities for research students to further develop their research and transferable skills, and finding effective ways of making students more aware of the opportunities available to them (skills development);

i. Introducing more effective ways of encouraging research students to reflect on their professional and career development needs (professional development and career);

j. Introducing more effective ways of increasing research students' understanding of the range of career opportunities open to them (professional development and career).

The focus of 2010 is PRES 'enhancement year', centred on two special workshops designed to allow HEIs to better understand what particular PRES results mean, compare notes and share effective practice, and be encouraged and empowered to use their

WHAT MOTIVATES PGRS TO PURSUE A RESEARCH DEGREE?

PRES includes questions which ask about research students' main motivations in pursuing a research degree, and what type of career they have in mind for when they complete. There is no reason to suspect that PRES respondents are not broadly typical of the whole research student population. A third (33.8%) of the 2009 respondents agreed that their main motivation was an interest in the subject, and a further third (31.7%) agreed that it was to improve their career prospects for an academic or research career. The next most popular answer (14.7%) was that "it felt like a natural step for me". In terms of career aspirations, nearly half (44%) had in mind an academic career in higher education (either research and teaching, or teaching only), one in seven (13.9%) had in mind a research career in higher education, and a further one in seven (13.9%) wished to pursue a research career outside higher education.

institutional PRES results to inform enhancement of the research student experience. The first workshop focused on intellectual climate. It included presentations on the NUS intellectual climate project (see Debbie McVitty's article in this issue), on links between PRES results and the QAA Code of practice, and on how one HEI had used PRES results to inform and successfully track enhancement initiatives. The second workshop, focusing on skills and career management, will be held on 6 July at Edinburgh Napier University. The next national administration of PRES will be in 2011.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Chris Park (2009) *The Research Student Experience: Lessons from PRES.* York: The Higher Education Academy. www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/york/documents/ourwork/postgraduate/pres2009.pdf.

Further information about PRES is available from the Academy website at www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/research/surveys/pres, or via email to surveys@heacademy.ac.uk.

The Smith Report (para 13) recommends that "the Higher Education Academy should work with Universities UK and Guild HE to extend its Postgraduate Research Experience Survey to more institutions and to improve the student response rate."

THE SPEED PhD

TONY BROMLEY MAKES INDUCTION MORE INTERESTING

I imagine many of us, at some point, have had a less than interesting induction experience in higher education. For example, the mass lecture with some important people wheeled out who you never see again and the 'gift' of numerous pieces of paper, booklets etc. that you lose track of or fail to read (I concede that not all induction programmes are characterised this way!).

The 'Speed PhD' programme was conceived to enhance the effectiveness of induction for research students in the first weeks of their PhD/MPhil studies and to provide a far more engaging, memorable and valuable experience. I first developed the programme with Dr Jim Boran at the University of Manchester and Dr Heather Sears at the University of Leeds, and it has now been used at a number of universities across the UK.

The 'Speed PhD' is a two-day workshop with a simple idea: do a PhD in two days. A typical workshop has 20 participants split into four groups. Groups are each given a research project and they take the project through every stage of the PhD, introducing important concepts, ideas, useful information as appropriate along the way, ultimately producing a 'mini-thesis'

which is subject to a viva at the end of day two. The workshop programme consists of a mix of group work on a research project with the structural stages of the research degree woven through and presentations on areas such as managing your research degree and careers. The mix of group working and 'presentation' sessions is flexible and can be tailored as required.

Other 'ingredients' include:

— each group is allocated and has to work with a supervisor 'style', role played by the workshop facilitator;
— the workshop progresses using the structure of the PhD, e.g. day one finishes with a summary report of the groups' research to date and plans going forward (analogous to the 'transfer' or 'upgrade' report);
— there is a points system associated with the research exercise that reflects good PhD practice;
— the workshop is the first step in a programme of training and development provision and introduces concepts of needs analysis and personal development planning throughout,

encouraging self assessment and reflection;
— the workshop introduces research students to staff from across the institution who support personal and professional development.

FEEDBACK

— Around 70–80% of participants are positive about the workshop, finding it valuable. However, around 10–20% of participants do not to take to the experiential nature of the workshop which is not uncommon in our experience for interactive experiential sessions.
— There has been supervisor feedback that students are easier to supervise subsequent to the Speed PhD workshop as, for example, they better understand the process and nature of the PhD.
— Participants from countries overseas with a different PhD process have provided very positive feedback in that they understand the nature and expectations of a UK PhD significantly better following the workshop.

The workshop acts as a way of introducing researchers to one another, building research community and perhaps going some way towards mitigating against the effects of isolation those studying for a research degree can commonly feel. Laughter in groups during the session and the swapping of email addresses at the end are common features.

FURTHER INFORMATION

A 'Tutor Pack' containing full details of 'Speed PhD' including all the handouts used can be downloaded from www.vitae.ac.uk/dop/76.html. The developments of Speed PhD at the University of Leeds are detailed at www.vitae.ac.uk/dop/612.html

Bromley, A. P., Boran, J. R. and Myddelton, W. A., [2007] 'Investigating the baseline skills of research students using a competency-based self-assessment method' Active Learning in Higher Education, 8 [2] pp117–137 http://alh.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/8/2/117

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DISCIPLINE PERSPECTIVES

A POSTGRADUATE FOCUS FROM FOUR OF THE ACADEMY'S SUBJECT CENTRES

PHILOSOPHICAL
AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Clare Saunders and Julie Closs examine initiatives
for postgraduate training in Philosophical and
Religious Studies

¶Postgraduate students are increasingly adept
at taking control of their own personal and
professional development, and are more career-
minded than ever before. Whether they plan to stay
within academia on finishing their doctorates, or
forge their careers outside it (and recent statistics
show that around 45% of doctoral research students
in the arts and humanities will continue to work in
higher education, more than in any other discipline
area), postgraduates acknowledge the importance
of acquiring, and being able to demonstrate and
articulate, a wide range of skills that will enhance their
performance in the world of work.

In 2004, the Arts and Humanities Research
Council (AHRC) set out a framework of research
training requirements for postgraduate study in the
arts and humanities, asking individual institutions
to provide training to help research students 'both
to complete a high-quality doctoral thesis and to
develop a range of knowledge, understanding and skills
necessary for their future employment'.

However, how to go about this was left open.
When trying to design such training, the individualised
nature of research projects, coupled with the fact
that doctoral students in these disciplines are often
working in small research communities, has often posed
difficulties. But with some postgraduates feeling that
the 'generic' research skills training available to them
had little to say about the particular subject-specific
demands of conducting successful research, or preparing
for a career in their chosen academic field, the Subject
Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies (PRS) felt
that it was in a position to make a positive contribution.

After consultation with departments and subject
associations on the design and delivery of such a
programme, it was trialled initially in a single pilot
region – Yorkshire and the North East of England – in

2005/6 and 2006/7, using funding obtained from the
AHRC collaborative research training scheme (£10,000
over two years). The six HEIs that we approached all
took part: Durham University, the University of Hull,
the University of Leeds, the University of Sheffield, the
University of York and York St John University.

The resulting events were designed and run
in a collegiate manner with academic staff at the
participating institutions, locating the training firmly
within the disciplines in question.

The events comprised a series of skills
development workshops – students explored a variety
of issues from those faced at the beginning of doctoral
study, to the challenges of preparing for life after
the PhD – as well as an opportunity for students to
present their own papers. Topics included:

— research methods and trends in the discipline;
— building your bibliography;
— the conference scene;
— giving presentations;
— breaking into the publishing racket;
— career planning.

The students who participated in these events
gave very good feedback – for example the workshops
were rated as 'good/very good' on average by 90% of
respondents. In addition to this, academic staff at the
participating institutions also had very positive comments.
Dr Hugh Pyper (Head of Biblical Studies, University of
Sheffield) said, 'I found it a particularly enjoyable event to
take part in myself as it was an opportunity to raise some
of the practical issues involved in developing a career in
academia which are not formally part of the academic
teaching and supervision for individual research students
… The feedback I had from students who participated
was uniformly excellent.'

Since the pilot, the scheme has continued and is now part of our nationwide programme for 'aspiring academics' (http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/aspiring_academics/index.html). It is always over-subscribed, and feedback is always overwhelmingly positive.

The clear demand for such discipline-specific training led to the subject centre providing £10,000 worth of grants, plus planning and organisational support, to projects across the country within institutions to fulfil a similar remit; that is, to improve training opportunities for postgraduate research students. The resultant projects, which began in 2008, have so far led to more than 70 additional postgraduate research students, over the course of the initial year, being able to take advantage of events ranging from workshops on teaching and curriculum design, conference presentations, and networking and publications advice, to seminars of close readings of theological texts and to using museum collections in PRS research. Further events and the production of legacy resources are in the pipeline.

The projects funded were:

— The Midlands Philosophy Research Training Network;
— Developing advanced research methods training in the study of religion: building capacity for a postgraduate training network for London and the South-East;
— Abstracta in Concreta: Engaging Museum Collections in PRS Research;
— Theological Texts Reading Group;
— British Postgraduate Philosophy Association (BPPA) Masterclass Series: Training and Continuation.

More details of the projects can be found on our 'aspiring academics' website (as above).

As well as getting very positive feedback from participants, the projects also had many other positive outcomes, which will lead to more work in this area. One example of this is outlined by Gordon Lynch, of Birkbeck College, who says, 'We plan to run a second network workshop in May 2010, drawing on our experience of this first event, and making use of other academic contacts within our consortium. Secondly, the experience of running this network has made it possible to make a successful submission from the Centre for Religion and Contemporary Society for an AHRC Collaborative Research Training grant which was awarded in June 2009 to run an intensive, week-long residential training programme in methods for the empirical study of religion in Oxford in September 2010, as well as developing a website with training materials on different methodological approaches that will represent a longer-term training resource for the field. The experience of this Academy award has been invaluable as a pilot project for the AHRC scheme, and we hope will form part of a longer process of building up capacity in research methods training in this field in the UK.'

FURTHER INFORMATION

Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies
www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk

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A postgraduate reflects (Elena Martin, Durham Doctoral Fellow, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University)

EXPLORING RESILIENCE

This is an extract from Dr Elizabeth Chapman's Hoult's chapter in the ESCalate publication *The Doctorate: stories of knowledge, power and becoming*, edited by Dr Tony Brown

[The events] were invaluable for my development. One of the most unique aspects of the training was that the advice was subject-specific. Although I had actively participated in the Durham University research training programme, the outcome of this was the acquisition of generic research skills. I believe that research-specific training is a very important, but very rare, element in the personal and professional development of postgraduate research students working in TRS. I have learnt a lot more from the subject centre courses than from any other training that I have been involved in.

The courses encouraged me to adopt a more holistic approach to my research: to focus on developing research skills, and to begin planning towards a career as early as possible. I was impressed by the presentations on the importance of gaining teaching experience, the need to submit work for publication, and the benefits of organising conferences. I took this advice and have since been involved in teaching undergraduates, am currently preparing an application to become a Fellow of the Academy, have had one article published and submitted two others, have initiated and coordinated a series of postgraduate workshops, and am in the process of setting up a postgraduate teaching group. If I had not attended the training events, I doubt that I would have understood the importance of these activities, had the confidence to attempt them, or had any idea of how to approach them.

One of the most valuable things that I learnt was the importance of effective oral communication. I have since gained the confidence to present academic papers at two high profile conferences and one public lecture.

The events gave me a deeper understanding of what doctoral research is. They gave me the opportunity to reflect on how I work as a research student, boosted my confidence, helped me to develop new skills, and gave me a new energy and enthusiasm for my research.

The following piece of writing was drafted in early 2008. It was the beginning of the final year of my PhD. It represents a snapshot of how I was thinking and feeling about the doctorate at that point when I made the transition from the middle stages of the work into the final year. Since I wrote it some of the things in the paper have been resolved and some haven't. Indeed, new issues have arisen that were not evident to me then. Rather than re-writing it now from a point of near arrival, though, I want to preserve the authenticity of what it represents as a particular point in my learning trajectory.

My thesis is entitled 'Representations of Resilience in Adult Learning'. It is an exploration of the nature of resilience in those learners who survive and thrive in universities, despite all sorts of obstacles that might reasonably be predicted to prevent them from doing so. In this sense I am both inside and outside the study; I am both a resilient learner myself (for reasons which will become clear further on) as well as (apparently) being an expert on resilience in adult learners.

The first draft of this paper was completed as part of an experiment in writing. I was keen to represent my own experience truthfully but I found that reality infuriatingly slid away as soon as I tried to frame it within academic language. My supervisor challenged me to take on board WB Yeats' assertion that "there's more enterprise/in walking naked". In other words, it is more courageous and more productive to shed our theoretical 'clothing' once in a while, in order to write authentically. For Yeats, this meant dispensing with his rich mythological framework in order to write about his own life. For me, it meant coming out from behind the disguise of academic language and theoretical references in order to be honest about what this experience of working on a PhD has been really been like. After that I did indeed cross over into a kind of writing territory that allowed me to represent my own story creatively and honestly.

This piece ends with the realisation that this would be necessary. So here it is, an account of the sorts of resilience that I have needed to develop and demonstrate in order to complete this thesis, as well as some of the events that gave rise to the need for resilience.

Isolation is the biggest challenge that I have faced, and continue to face, in the course of working on this PhD thesis. Other aspects of the experience have certainly tested my stamina, my patience and my nerve but they have not required me to be resilient in quite the same way. These other things are: finding the time to read and write intensely while I am working full time; complying with the tedious and unimaginative bureaucratic structures that govern the PhD process; and the struggle to get past low expectations into a space where I could take risks and work creatively within the boundaries of the doctorate. I've had to knuckle down and bare my teeth at times over the last couple of years but that wasn't so bad – I've always had to look after myself. What is much, much worse than any of this is coping with the intense loneliness that accompanies the process.

I understand, of course, that completing any PhD is always a solitary experience. By definition, any piece of work that aims to make an original contribution to the academy must be created independently and must go beyond what has gone before it. This piece of work, though, has put me in a particularly lonely position for two reasons. Firstly, I am working in a space between and beyond two disciplines – Education and English Literature. This does not give me two homes – it makes me homeless. It has also meant that, whether I liked it or not, I have adopted a subversive position because I have ended up challenging some of fundamental precepts of both disciplines. Secondly, I have developed a methodology that combines biographical interviews with literary criticism and autobiographical writing and which uses writing itself is a form of enquiry. I am not 'writing up' some other piece of research that is going on elsewhere in the conventional way.

My decision to go down this path was not based on a whim or the desire to be flamboyant. I have made these choices because, early on in the study, it became apparent to me that human resilience in learning situations is too complex and too elusive to be pinned down and explained by the application of either conventional, evidence-based approaches to research, or by the pure critique of literary texts. Neither discipline alone seemed to be capable of providing a language that could adequately describe some of what began to emerge from the study about resilience – questions of love and loss, of death and resurrection and of hope. This was difficult. I like to think that I am an articulate person and my original disciplinary home – English Literature – is constituted entirely of the written and spoken word. To find myself in a place where words were inadequate was challenging. So I have had to find a space beyond the confines of the two disciplines that would allow an adequate language to emerge. I have therefore put myself in exile. Exile is dangerous and lonely but like other voluntary migrants I have chosen it because I understand the risks of staying at home to be far higher than those I will encounter abroad.

Three particular aspects of isolation have tested my resilience. These are: the lack of safe readers; the search for home; and the loss of my academic faith.

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ENGLISH MA

In 2007, the Academy's Subject Centre for English published *The Taught MA in English*, by Samantha Smith. This is an outline of the main findings, taken from the executive summary of the report.

¶ *The Taught MA in English* explores the costs and benefits for staff and students of the taught postgraduate degree in English. It also considers national trends in recruitment and course provision. The study thereby aims to assist departments in course planning, delivery and development. In the broadest terms this study asks, who are the individuals undertaking Masters programmes, what are their motivations and expectations, and how are courses currently meeting their needs?

The report was conducted in two main parts: by commissioning HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency, www.hesa.ac.uk) data and gathering information about course provision and also through carrying out interviews with individuals and groups. The HESA data indicates remarkably consistent recruitment to taught Masters programmes in English, 3129 students enrolled in 2002/03, 3550 in 2003/04, rising slightly to 3542 enrolments in 2004/05. However, an error with HESA data collection from the Open University in 2002/03 could partially account for this increase.

Despite overall consistency in the levels of enrolment, the data presented show small shifts in the age and highest previous qualification of taught Masters students. Although the percentage decrease in the number of Masters students with an undergraduate degree as their highest previous qualification is small – falling from 63.5% in 2002/03 to 58% in 2004/05 – it may prove an early indication of significant shifts within the Masters population. The further diversification of the taught postgraduate cohort is not immediately evident from age group data.

In 2002/03 and 2004/05 approximately 42% of the MA population were aged 21–24 and 58% were 25 and over. Respondent opinion in interviews and focus groups suggested shifts in highest previous qualification and age within the MA population were anticipated as a result of increased financial pressure on the

"English Studies postgraduate numbers have steadily continued to rise. There has been a 78% rise in full-time postgraduate numbers (and a 20% rise in part-time numbers) between 2003–04 and 2007–08, the last year for which these figures are available. It appears that a considerable element in that increase has been the boom in postgraduates in Creative Writing."
Professor Ben Knights
Director of the Academy's English Subject Centre

undergraduate population. However, although taught postgraduate courses are obviously susceptible to change in the wider higher education landscape, there is no immediate indication that changes to undergraduate fee structures have significantly impacted upon recruitment. This may be due to the corresponding targets to increase undergraduate admissions and the increased use of the MA as the 'exit qualification' for those wishing to differentiate themselves in the growing graduate marketplace.

An unexpected benefit of the financial pressure on universities to rationalise provision has been an increased sense of intellectual community resulting from taught postgraduate degrees. Shared core courses and skills training, although not universally popular, have introduced a base level from which students can develop with their peers and created opportunities in which to interact. The provision of broader 'umbrella' structured Masters programmes is at present protecting 'niche' subjects at this level. From interviews it became clear that staff feel market forces are gradually coming to bear on course selection. This has led to the privileging of broadly based subjects, which can support a greater variety of 'niche' student interests without the need for further resources.

The survey of courses carried out for this study shows a small decrease in the number of taught postgraduate programmes from 289 individual courses in 2004, to a total of 277 courses in 2006. Overall taught postgraduate programme provision remains buoyant with new courses being accredited each year. An increasing rationalisation may account for the small drop in course numbers, as broadly themed programmes allow students to pursue multiple pathways within a single course structure.

The taught postgraduate programme in English will always be in part a liminal qualification; the MA is a gateway to postgraduate research but also an exit qualifiation and this duality remains both its strength and weakness. This study has clearly identified a unique set of benefits arising for staff, students and institutions as a result of taught postgraduate provision. For students:

— testing and training ground for students considering a research degree or career in academia;
— completion of academic studies for those who haven't satisfied their academic interest after three years;
— opportunity to pursue an area of particular interest for returning students;
— qualification to enhance employability and differentiate individual within the graduate marketplace.

For staff and departments:

— creation of a unique shared culture and intellectual community;
— presence of potential doctoral candidates;
— postgraduate teaching opportunities for staff;
— research-led teaching enabling staff development.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Smith, Samantha (2007) 'The Taught MA in English' (English Subject Centre, Report series, ISBN: 1-905846-13-9): www.english.heacademy.ac.uk/archive/publications/reports/taughtma.pdf

SAMANTHA SMITH runs Transition Tradition — an online publication and portal that helps students and graduates to make the transition into creative careers. www.transitiontradition.com

The Bioscience Subject Centre student essay award 2009 was won by Susan Turrell. This is her essay on the topic: *Given your degree, what are you looking forward to in the future?*

I wasn't your typical 12 year-old. While my friends were discussing make-up and boys, I was more interested in the events surrounding a sheep called Dolly. She was different from any other sheep, and it was a 1 in 277 chance that led to her creation. As a kid I was only able to grasp the basic concept of Dolly and what she meant to the world. But that would change …

I've had a curious mind for as long as I can remember. As a child I used to constantly ask questions as I tried to understand the world around me. I was drawn to science as it offered new, exciting explanations to all the stuff that used to fascinate me. As I got older, genetics and molecular biology were getting established in the public eye due to breakthroughs like the Human Genome Project and Dolly the sheep. These discoveries really caught my interest and led me to a degree in Molecular Biology.

The more I learned, the more I wanted to know about the inner workings of a cell. Each cell function had an intricate mechanism, and all these different working parts were connected in extraordinary networks. Also, to learn from scientists who were at the cutting edge of their research was a new experience that made the information more personal, more real. I could really see myself in that position, imparting this hard-earned knowledge to the next generation. It was an easy decision to apply for a PhD, but one that would lead me into uncharted territory.

I started out like I'm sure most PhD students do, full of optimism that I was going to discover something great, acquire huge reams of data and make a significant contribution to my field. This notion did not last very long! That first year taught me a lot about determination, and forced me to lower my expectations a bit. However as time went on, I became more confident at different techniques and in my own abilities. I gained a much wider understanding of the cell than my undergraduate course could ever give me. It's amazing how much you can glean from a passing conversation, or a guest lecturer that you just squeezed into your schedule! Work in the laboratory wasn't easy. Some things that look so simple on paper can inexplicably refuse to work, but things did improve and I improved too.

I had been working on my project for well over a year before I had my first real breakthrough. It had finally worked! It was a great feeling, but I realised as time went on that I had lost some of the motivation that had got me to this point. My experiments were picking up, I was working in a stimulating environment and I got on well with my lab mates, so what had changed?

It turned out that I was beginning to see that a life in academia wasn't for me. This came as a bit of a surprise as I'd spent my entire life learning, and thought that this was what I wanted. I'm used to meticulously planning out every hour of my day, so it's quite scary to suddenly have a gaping hole in your future plans, and to not know what you're going to do after your degree. I had to think about what I really wanted.

The first thing I had to do was let go of the idea that I need to plan everything, and look at what I enjoyed doing. I got here because I like the big concepts in science and understanding how things work. But most of all, I like learning about science and communicating these new ideas to other people. I really like the idea of working for an institution that promotes science and makes it exciting and easy for the public to understand. It was refreshing to realise that there are lots of different careers out there and I just had to find out which ones would suit me.

That's when I began to notice all the opportunities that were available to PhD students to get a bit more experience, and I took full use of them. Not only did it give me something new to put

my energy into, but it was also a real contrast to my normal routine of lab work. Getting more involved in the department and taking on extracurricular activities has made me appreciate my project a lot more. I've made new friends and have learnt a lot about how I work and what I need to be productive.

It will soon be time to make some decisions about life after my PhD. So what am I looking forward to in the future? I'm looking forward to a new start. To earning my own money in a job I enjoy and being independent in a way that I haven't been before. I'm looking forward to using my creative skills to raise awareness of all the brilliant scientific discoveries that are being made every day, and using my knowledge in a practical way. In five or ten years time I could be writing features for Nature magazine, or be a forensic scientist, I could be a researcher for a cancer charity or teaching Sixth formers about Mendelian pea plants. I have the potential to do all of these things because of this PhD course.

I may never make a ground breaking discovery like Wilmut and his collection of sheep, but I'm still passionate about science and want to express that by enthusing others and applying what I've learned. At the minute, I'm just looking forward to the mystery of not knowing where I'll be.

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BOLOGNA
TEN YEARS ON

PAM DENICOLO DISCUSSES THE IMPLICATIONS
AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS
FOR UK POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION

In my foreword to an authoritative digest on the Bologna process (Fell and Haines, 2009), I reflected that in 1999 the Bologna Declaration caused nary a stir in the UK postgraduate community. To those who noticed its emergence its prime focus seemed to be on gaining some comparability of undergraduate degrees across the European nations involved (originally 29, now 45) and thus it was remote from the established, arcane policy and procedures that characterised the field of doctoral education.

However, successive biennial revisions and extensions of the original documents shifted attention to other aspects of the higher education system across Europe, with doctoral education coming into the limelight in 2005. This was a gentle awakening into what was to become a turbulent scene, though one in which UKHE was often to take a lead role, for instance in the support and the training of postgraduate researchers. This article charts transformations to UK postgraduate education that were stimulated by or were contemporaneous with the Bologna process, while also speculating on those that may yet come.

The laudable aims of the Bologna process were declared to be the establishment, by 2010 and through a voluntary process, of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) with a system of readily comparable degrees which would promote and enhance the employability of its citizens so that they could gain competitive advantage in international labour markets. In the early years the focus was on the first (Bachelors) and second (Masters) cycles of HE, with the so called Dublin Descriptors emerging in 2004. These characterised the expected common intellectual attributes and achievements of those who have received Bachelors, Masters and doctoral awards and were based on, among other sources, the QAA's 2001 Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ, updated in 2008).

It is notable that, while much may have been afoot on the continent of Europe through the iteration of Bologna-inspired biennial meetings, neither the government, its agencies nor the HE sector in the UK were ignoring the development of graduate education. A wealth of reviews and policy documents (for example, the Joint Statement from the Research Councils (RCUK 2001), the Roberts Review (2002) and the subsequent funding for skills development of new researchers, HEFCE's *Improving Standards in Postgraduate Research Degrees* (2003) and the QAA review of the *Code of Practice for Postgraduate Degrees* in 2004) all combined to result in the excellent outcome of the Gap Analysis conducted by the RCUK on the 2005 European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Con-

duct for the Recruitment of Researchers. While differences emerged and still remain between UK policy and practice and the Code and Charter – such as in the length of registration for Masters degrees, the status (student/staff) of doctoral students and the diversity of doctoral degrees (specifically unusual being the professional doctorate) – the development of support and training of UK postgraduates was evidently progressing exceptionally well, meeting or exceeding, at least on paper, the suggested standards.

Further reviews and reports to stimulate this process have appeared almost biannually since then, causing those people most involved with postgraduate education to continuously review provision and procedures in this arena. Graduate schools in a variety of guises have been established in most universities (Denicolo *et al*, 2010) to provide high-level courses and workshops on the substance of disciplines, research methods and generic and transferable skills, with added facilities for postgraduate study and leisure activities. Institutions review annually their compliance to their code of practice and are encouraged to share good practice through organisations such as Vitae and UKCGE (Council for Graduate Education), and courses, workshops, conferences and publications proliferate for those interested in postgraduate issues, particularly the initial and further development of supervisors of postgraduate studies.

Despite this apparently positive picture of energetic transformation, some caveats remain about the pervasiveness and degree of embedding of good practice within and between institutions, as well questions arising about the financial viability of research as opposed to taught postgraduate programmes as Roberts funding decreases or disappears. Further, although the anticipated Smith Review of Postgraduate Education (2010) should recognise the current high standing internationally of UK postgraduate degrees, those with noses in the wind of parliament have sensed, in the recent economic climate, the high frequency of allusions to concentration of research and contested, targeted funding. Institutions are already reviewing their portfolios of courses to maximise income and reduce costs, though most remain convinced of the intellectual value embodied in the complete suite of programmes from Bachelors to doctorates. Two reports published in March 2010 support this. The Million Plus report noted: "Postgraduate study is an integral and crucial part of the activities, opportunities and qualifications provided by the UK's universities", while the League of European Research Universities avers that: "it is talent more than technology that society and business needs from universities".

It is important that the UK maintains both its reputation in relation to the Bologna process and a level of postgraduate provision that can produce the talent necessary for the knowledge economy. To do this, attention needs to be paid to ensure that:

— all academic staff involved in postgraduate studies become familiar with both European and international ongoing developments to counter any complacency and promote their own professional skills development;
— funding to retain/enhance facilities and resources for such students is identified and ring-fenced;
— leaders in the academy engage with developments in the EHEA to influence ongoing developments and to nurture them within their institutions and nationally.

Other useful but less immediately critical changes to current practice would be the facilitation of, rather than the paying of lip-service to, foreign language acquisition of UK students, their opportunities to gain experience abroad and, more controversially, an explicit and formal elevation of their status within the community of scholars.

To some, all of these recommendations may seem radical, while to others they may be obvious and sensible, but we live in competitive and swiftly moving times. Those who stand still will be overtaken and left behind. Rather, in the UK, we should build on our recent success, which includes the development over the last 15 years of a range of postgraduate-orientated organisations and interest groups that stimulate and cultivate effort, to maintain and enhance a strategic advantage in a world in which knowledge is the most precious commodity and most sustainable resource.

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The Smith Report (para 47) recommends that "HEIs should continue to ensure that their masters level courses are compliant with the Bologna Process through the use of credits and learning outcomes."

GRADUATE JUNCTION

DANIEL COLEGATE ON A NEW RESOURCE FOR EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS

During my PhD, myself and a fellow Masters researcher identified flaws in the information flows for early-career researchers. Researchers have three sources of information about work done in their chosen field: published literature, conferences and their supervisor. Literature reviews, while essential, can only ever reveal completed work, relevant conferences do not happen every week and supervisors mostly rely on these same sources. We felt it was very easy to become overly focused on the specifics of your own work and to lose a sense of what other related work is currently being done, especially by other early-career researchers.

We also noticed that very distinct and separate literatures and conferences exist for different subject areas, despite the large overlap between some disciplines. Networking is an essential part of the research process: promoting collaboration, generating new ideas and preventing duplication of effort. Consequently, we thought it would be great if there was a common point that brought together Masters, PhD and postdoctoral researchers from all disciplines. By making 'Research Keywords' rather than 'discipline' central to the networking process,

we hoped to break down existing disciplinary boundaries so that it would be possible to find others with similar research interests regardless of which department, institutions or country they were in.

From this idea we started Graduate Junction in May 2008. The website was initially launched with only very basic profiles and search functionality, and over the past 18 months we have only added functionality that has been requested by the community. Every addition we have made to Graduate Junction was requested by early career researchers, making it a truly researcher-led initiative.

Today, Graduate Junction is the largest online academic network in the UK dedicated to the needs of early-career researchers, providing an opportunity to network based on research interests as well as gain peer-support on issues related to undertaking doctoral research.

It continues to be a researcher-led, self-funded initiative which we have managed alongside our own research commitments. While I developed the website, my co-founder Esther Dingley was almost entirely responsible for the original growth
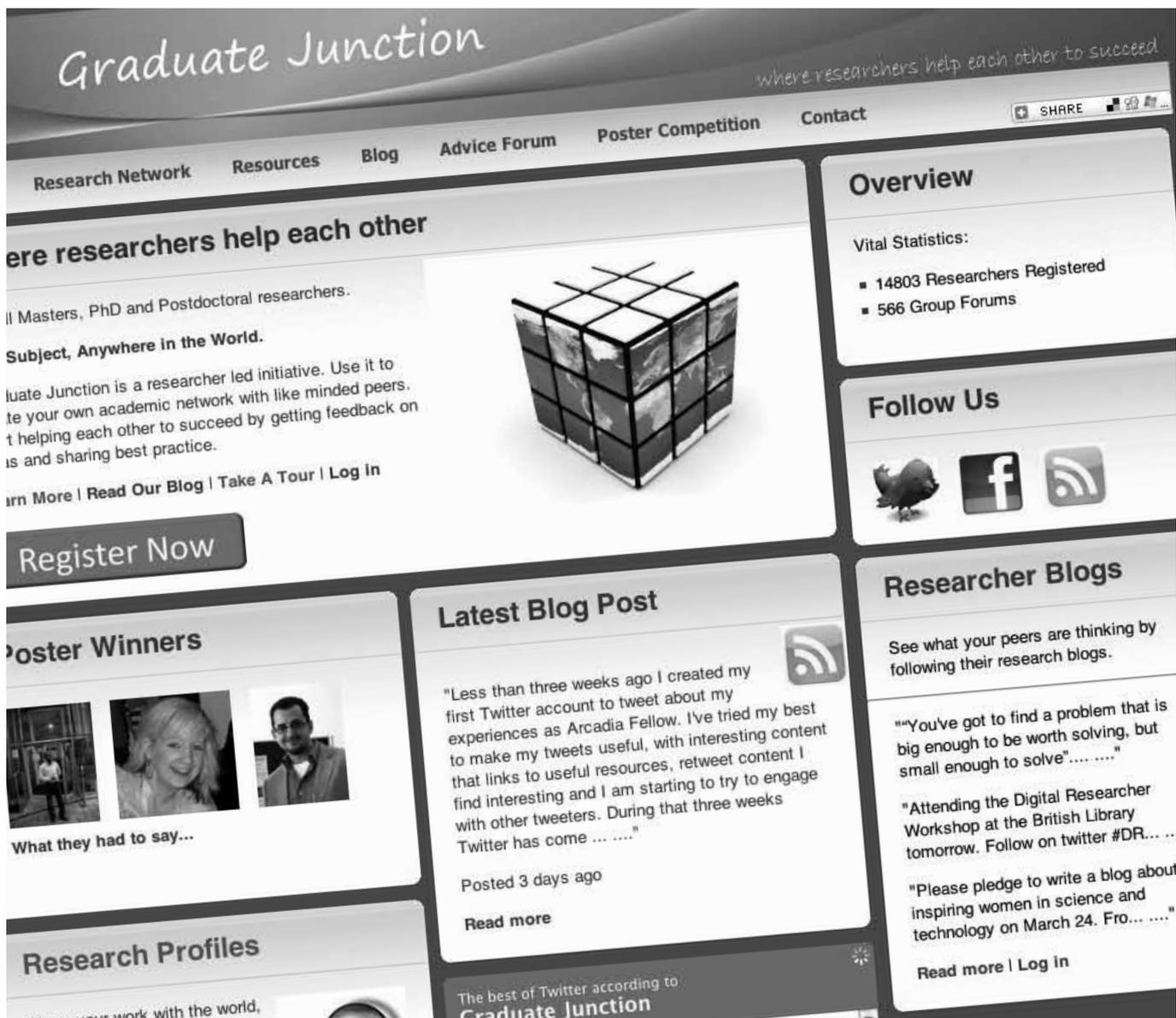
of the researcher network, the website receiving over 150,000 unique visitors, 1.5 million page views and within two years almost 15,000 registered researchers.

Graduate Junction has featured in popular press such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (US) and the *Times Higher Education* (UK) and has been presented at a number of events, including at the Vitae Annual 2009 Conference. We have had a number of volunteers from within the community and recently Summer Interns who have helped develop and promote Graduate Junction to whom we are very grateful.

We have been overwhelmed by the responses and personal e-mails we have had from not only researchers themselves but also academic staff and testimonials from graduate schools, which motivates us to continue, despite our limited resources, to

provide this opportunity for our peers. We are currently looking towards larger organisations to help us to establish the infrastructure necessary to ensure the sustainable future of this community.

www.graduatejunction.net

DANIEL COLEGATE is the co-founder of Graduate Junction.

WHO OWNS THE DOCTORATE?

CHRIS PARK *DISCUSSES*
THE CHANGING NATURE OF THE DOCTORATE

There has been a great deal of discussion in recent years about the changing nature of the doctorate in the UK, partly triggered by the publication by the Academy in 2007 of my discussion paper, *Redefining the Doctorate*. That paper was designed to frame a national debate on the subject, which included a conference on the topic, held at the British Library in London in November 2008. Since then, the QAA have taken a lead in furthering discussion about the changing doctorate, through the doctoral characteristics project, which Janet Bohrer describes in her article in this issue (see page 48).

There is lively debate on how fit for purpose the UK PhD is today, after just over a century of evolution, and in the face of additional requirements such as the need to include skills training and personal development, and the challenges posed by the Lisbon and Bologna agendas within Europe and growing international competition for high quality research students.

Underpinning the national debate about the changing nature of the doctorate is the rarely asked but fundamental question – who actually owns the doctorate? There are clear parallels with the question 'Who owns the university?', which David Watson explored so clearly in his 2008 *Quality Matters* paper of the same name, published by the QAA.

While universities remain custodians of academic standards, and have the responsibility to award the degree of doctorate, just how autonomous are UK universities? The question is more than just academic, because the answer has a strong bearing on how HEIs across the UK respond to global, European and national agendas – such as the Research Council's expectation that the research students they fund will have access to appropriate skills training and personal development opportunities. The question is also relevant in the context of recent discussions about the pros and cons of concentrating doctoral education in the UK in a restricted number of HEIs, with larger critical masses of active researchers engaged in high quality research, more cost-effective concentrations of equipment and resources, more vibrant research cultures and environments, and thus hopefully a better quality of research student experience.

While the QAA defines the framework within which institutions manage the quality and standard of their academic awards, which institutions ignore at their peril, they nonetheless retain the authority to make their own academic awards. Naturally, chickens would come home to roost for an institution at the time of their next institutional audit if they adopted a rogue approach to the design and delivery of their programmes that deliberately contravened the QAA's Academic Infrastructure (the Code of Practice, Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, Subject Benchmark Statements, and Programme Specifications), because they would find themselves named and shamed publicly, and this could and probably would have an enduring adverse impact on their reputation and recruitment.

Similarly, an institution in receipt of Research Council studentship funding, and Roberts Money (for skills development), would risk sanctions or loss of funding if they blatantly ignore RC guidance and expectations. An institution that paid little attention to PhD submission rates would risk sanctions and loss of funding from Research Councils if it fell below the threshold of 60% of students submitting within four years, and sanctions from the funding councils if it failed to meet the target qualification (completion) rate of 70% within seven years. An institution whose procedures led to a significant number of serious complaints by research students (particularly externally, to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator) would find its reputation and credibility dinted by media coverage, which could also impact adversely on recruitment.

But these are all indirect means by which the behaviour of HEIs in the area of research degree programmes are moderated and monitored. Ultimately they are market mechanisms that work through reputational damage. None of them removes or eclipses the simple truth that institutions make awards, and have the authority (granted by the Privy Council through their Charter and by virtue of degree awarding powers) to define their own awards and approve their own regulations, definitions and criteria.

So, if external agencies such as the QAA, the Research Councils and even the funding councils can only "regulate" institutions' research degree programmes indirectly, the inescapable fact remains that institutions "own" the doctorate. This is why institutions have their own PhD regulations (which admittedly are generally variations on a theme), why we see the emergence of what elsewhere I have called "New Variant PhDs", why some institutions make skills training compulsory while others declare it to be an expectation, why the research student experience varies between institutions, and so on.

It is why there is no "national curriculum" for the doctorate, even though the core ingredients of the research degree programme are similar between many institutions.

And – it is often argued – this is exactly as it should be, because the external examiner system in the UK provides an important "quality control" mechanism that ensures and assures parity of quality and standards within and between institutions. But there is a growing body of literature that challenges the received wisdom about the objectivity of the PhD examination (particularly the viva), and frames it as contingent and contested.

Any self-respecting HEI will naturally want to ensure that its research degree programmes remain fit for purpose, but this throws up another major challenge because the "purpose" of a PhD today is not the same as it was even a few decades ago. No longer is the PhD primarily an apprenticeship for future academics; across the UK as a whole only three out of ten PhD students are likely to end up in a career within HE. Seven out of ten will not, and preparing PhD students adequately for the world of work (beyond the academy) is now a major challenge to all HEIs. The PhD experience today is as much about the process (developing the researcher) as it is about the product (the thesis), which means not only that institutions have a duty of care to their research students to prepare them to make a quick and effective transition beyond the ivory tower and start adding real value to their future employers, but it also poses some interesting challenges for the PhD examination system. Just what, in this brave new world of doctoral education, as we examining? And how does the traditional viva, and the traditional reliance on a closed examination, fit in with these new expectations?

In final analysis, HEIs own the doctorate, but as with all enterprises they need to pay proper attention to the different needs and expectations of their different stakeholder groups. The stakeholders groups for the doctorate include the research students themselves (sometime characterised as the "worker ants" of the HE research system), departments and faculties (who value the research, the fresh perspectives, the fee income), institutions (who value the contribution of research students to research critical mass, outputs and reputation), disciplines (in which, to borrow a US term, research students serve as "custodians of the disciplines"), and even UK plc (for whom doctoral students and graduates represent a highly skilled workforce, and valuable social, cultural and economic capital). Balancing the different needs and expectations of these different stakeholder groups is not easy, but institutions need to rise to the challenge if they are to remain successful (intellectually and financially), remain competitive in the global marketplace, retain their academic reputation and credibility, and play their rightful role as producers, consumers and exchangers of knowledge in the new global knowledge economy.

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COMMUNITY
MATTERS

DEBBIE McVITTY OF THE NUS LOOKS AT STUDENT-LED INITIATIVES TO ENHANCE THE INTELLECTUAL CLIMATE FOR POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTS

The Academy's Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) has consistently returned comparatively low scores on its intellectual climate scale. For example, the mean intellectual climate scale score for PRES 2009 was 3.50 on a scale of 1–5, compared to 4.03 for supervision, the highest scoring scale. Or, more meaningfully, only 49.1% of the over 18,000 respondents agreed to the proposition "I feel integrated into my department's community".

The pedagogical values underpinning the PRES intellectual climate scale posit an ideal of a research community comprising postgraduates and more experienced researching academics. The implicit model is the "community of practice" in which the novice researcher learns the nature and practice of research through engaging with a subject community of academic practitioners in addition to the named supervisor(s).

While PRES scores indicate that not every postgraduate research student currently benefits from a stimulating intellectual climate, it is not as clear that the values associated with the community of practice are uppermost in the minds of institutional administrators when considering how postgraduate research degrees should be managed. It is certainly easier to make a policy or practice intervention in the area of skills development provision, for example, than in abstract goals like "enhanced research community".

But lack of integration into the research community may have tangible impacts on postgraduate researchers. Researchers analysed responses to a postgraduate research experience questionnaire conducted at Oxford, using similar scales to those later adopted by PRES. They found that the scales tended to relate to each other, in that students who reported a positive experience of their departmental intellectual climate also reported higher levels of research and transferable skills development (Trigwell & Dunbar-Goddet, 2005). A study in Finland has found that the healthiest research environment in terms of lower levels of stress, anxiety and exhaustion was experienced by PhD researchers who perceived themselves to be members of a scholarly community (Pyhältö, *et al,* 2009). Research communities provide intellectual and pastoral support for novice researchers, impacting on researchers' understanding of the practice of research and how effective they are at doing it.

With this in mind, NUS has won funding from Vitae (as part of its 2009–10 *Innovate* funding cycle) to conduct research and undertake practice in enhancing the extent

to which postgraduate researchers can have an active stake in their own research community using the model of student-led initiatives. Student-led initiatives are a growing area within the wider provision of transferable skills development opportunities. Typically an institution, graduate school or department provides small amounts of funding for a research student-led conference, event, training workshop or other initiative.

The NUS project comprises three main strands: research into the concepts of intellectual climate and research community, mapping of existing practice around facilitating student-led initiatives, and coordinating small-scale pilots with students' unions in five universities, to be evaluated and published as case studies in September 2010. The project offers the opportunity to students' unions to engage innovatively with postgraduate researchers, who are traditionally viewed as a difficult cohort to reach.

At this half-way stage there are two lessons. The first is that where student-led initiatives are undertaken, there are multiple benefits to students and to institutions. In the experience of those who make provision for student-led initiatives, postgraduate students are perfectly capable of defining their own intellectual needs and designing a way of meeting those needs. It is not surprising that postgraduate researchers tend to apply for funding to organise events at which researchers can meet and talk to other researchers, often across the disciplines.

At the same time those postgraduates create opportunities to meet other researchers in their field, gain practical experience of organising academic encounters and provide intellectual opportunities in their subject that would not otherwise have been available. An evaluation by NUS of student-led activities shows positive outcomes for students in terms of skills development, increased confidence, new networks and new directions in research, while institutions benefit both from showcasing the intellectual creativity of their research students, and from not having to put administrative resources into organising, marketing and running postgraduate research community activities themselves. Student-led initiatives work to give postgraduate students a stake in shaping their intellectual climate so they can become active participants rather than passive recipients of their research culture.

The second learning point is that research community is by no means a straightforward concept. Research communities do not always work in perfect intellectual harmony. A recent JISC-commissioned report on the lives and technologies of early career

researchers observed: "At the heart of research communities is a tension between openness and secrecy, hand-in-glove cooperation and fierce competition" (James, et al., 2009). Access to research cultures may vary by gender, age, nationality or other factors so that where a research community appears active some students may still experience the culture as exclusive (Deem & Brehony, 2000).

Although there is an implicit consensus among those who coordinate student-led initiatives that it is good for researchers to meet other researchers, the values and benefits of research community are not widely articulated. Moreover, where community initiatives do not work, there is limited understanding of why not.

The NUS project has raised questions about the extent to which research community is articulated as a positive value to postgraduate research students. If the supervisor, department or institution does not directly encourage community behaviour, researchers in disciplines traditionally constituted as individualistic will continue to model their behaviour on the implicit ideal of the lone researcher. Student-led initiatives model a bottom-up approach to enhancing the intellectual climate, but without explicit support from the wider academic community, efforts such as these will remain scattered, and sustainable only with considerable effort.

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THE SCOTTISH RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

RACHEL ADAMSON REFLECTS ON THE POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN SCOTLAND

Much has been said of the lonely postgraduate research student (PGR), isolated from other students and research staff, typing away late into the night without a soul to talk to. The latest results from PRES indicate that a lack of integration into their department is a significant issue in some areas and that more needs to be done to integrate students into their departments and connect them with their fellow students, to save them from those lonely nights, or at least some of them.

In the past ten years, however, a range of collaborations have developed around Scotland to try to counter this issue: each enhancing the postgraduate research student experience while increasing the skills our PGRs gain during their study and ultimately building Scotland's research capacity. From multi-million pound investments in research pools to student-run e-journals, Scotland is reimagining the PGR's experience.

SINAPSE (Scottish Imaging Network: a platform for Scientific Excellence) is one of ten 'research pools' currently established in Scotland: strategic collaborations between universities in disciplinary or multi-disciplinary areas. The result is groupings of significant critical mass well positioned to compete with the best in the world in creating new knowledge as well as in offering enhanced graduate training.

With 19 PGR students linked across six universities, SINAPSE PGRs have access to the expertise of researchers working in a wide variety of imaging-related disciplines as well as a broad array of imaging methods. By providing opportunities to meet other SINAPSE PhD students, through events such as a three day residential induction and summer schools, SINAPSE encourages a network of mutual support that few PhD students have from the very beginning of their studies. The range of academic backgrounds represented within SINAPSE means students are able to share their experiences with others in similar situations, thus benefitting from discovering different perspectives on their work. Johanna Simpson, a second year SINAPSE student explains:

"For us as PhD students, the greatest advantages of being part of SINAPSE is the instant network it provides, both in a professional and a social sense, and the diversity of disciplines represented in SINAPSE".

Where the research pools are bringing together students into ready-made international communities of peers, other communities have developed organically through the vision and drive of the students themselves. In 2002, students at the University of Glasgow developed an innovative way to boost the early careers of PGRs in the arts, humanities, social sciences and education, through the establishment of eSharp, an international online journal run entirely by graduate students for postgraduate and recent postdoctoral students. It provides a critical but supportive route into the realm of academic publishing for emerging academics.

Johanna Green, a final year PhD student at the University of Glasgow was on the board of eSharp from 2006–08. She is now in her final year of her PhD and credits her time on the journal board as one of the highlights of her postgraduate experience. She explains:

> "eSharp – or indeed any postgraduate-led journal – is not only an excellent way to develop your graduate attributes and transferable skills, but also the perfect antidote to the feelings of isolation and loneliness which can often accompany postgraduate study. It provides an opportunity for postgraduates to make connections with students from other departments, disciplines and often other universities and to create networks – and dare I say it, friendships – with other postgraduates. Being involved with a project like eSharp allowed me to develop many of the skills I need day-to-day as a postgraduate such as time management, copy-editing, and organisational skills as well as giving me an insight into project management and writing funding bids, all of which are of use to me as I come closer to finishing my PhD.

> "Most importantly though, it gave me the chance to meet other like-minded postgraduates; the friends I've made during my time on the eSharp board have been some of the most important of my time at university allowing us to offer one another advice and much-needed support as we go through the PhD process together".

Both of these examples paint a very different picture to the stereotypical 'hermit' traditionally depicted. Recently a series of workshops has been developed with the aim of making such supported and positive experiences the norm for Scottish PGRs. On 11 September 2009, students, vice principals of research, directors of graduate schools and other practitioners and policy makers from around Scotland converged on Edinburgh to discuss the main themes of importance to the sector regarding the postgraduate research student experience. A collaboration currently involving the Scottish Funding Council, QAA Scotland, Vitae and the Higher Education Academy is using the themes identified to form the basis of further workshops to be held over the course of 2010–11 (see www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/benchmarking). The themes will also feed into the work being led by QAA Scotland, with the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) International Benchmarking Working Group to benchmark student experiences of research degrees in Scotland with reference to learning from practice internationally. The purpose of both pieces of work is to support the Scottish higher education sector in enhancing the postgraduate research degree student experience.

The experience of students within both SINAPSE and eSharp illustrate two of the many innovative ways in which Scottish PGRs are being supported. The importance of the PGR experience is increasingly being recognised and creative methods of support are producing real benefits to students. The challenge is now to build on this and replicate these positive experiences across Scotland.

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DEVELOPING DOCTORAL EMPLOYABILITY TO BENEFIT ALL

JANET METCALFE ON THE ROLE OF THE DOCTORAL DEGREE

The role and nature of the doctoral degree in the UK has been the subject of ongoing debate since it was introduced in 1917. However, in the last 20 years there have been an increasing number and range of drivers impacting on the doctorate as an academic award. The very nature of research has changed: the growth of technology and remote networks ensure that it is now truly a global endeavour and there is an emphasis on working between and across traditional disciplines. Increasingly, government and funders want to see the application and impact of academic research, along with the communication of research to wider audiences. The traditional doctorate model of a student-supervisor relationship working towards a piece of original research inevitably looks somewhat tired against these challenges.

Perhaps the strongest driver is the recognition that, with the emergence of the Asian economies, the UK economy will only thrive globally if it transforms itself into a knowledge economy. Researchers are seen as key to this transformation. In the UK we have seen the importance of the knowledge economy and the role of UK universities highlighted most recently in *Higher Ambitions* and the *Leitch Review*, which recognised the value of higher level skills, including PhDs.

"… higher level skills are key drivers of innovation, entrepreneurship, management, leadership and research and development critical to a high skills, high performance economy increasingly in demand from high performance, global employers."

If the knowledge-based economy is to succeed, then all employment sectors will need the types of higher level skill that come from postgraduate study. However, possession of a doctoral degree does not automatically improve employment prospects. A researcher's aspirations, ability, drive, luck and persistence, the area of study and experience, the state of the employment market, all play a role. A recent Vitae survey of employers demonstrates a diverse range of perceptions of the value of researchers' skill sets dependent on how engaged employers are in recruiting doctoral graduates. This reinforces a previous review of the literature into employers' views of the skills of early career researchers, including doctoral graduates, which demonstrated a diverse range of informed and uninformed views about their value as employees.

Generally, employers who have experience of employing doctoral graduates are more likely to be informed about and appreciate the skills and qualities they have, particularly their problem solving abilities, drive and motivation, leadership and project management. Employers who do not recruit doctoral graduates are more likely to have stereotypical views of a lack of interpersonal skills, being overqualified and having narrow interests. There were consistent messages in the literature review, however, of a general lack of commercial awareness and the importance of doctoral graduates being able to make swift and effective transitions between working cultures: to hit the ground running.

The employability of doctoral graduates is a key issue. Over half of UK-domiciled doctoral graduates find employment outside the higher education sector. Whether this is by choice or necessity, it beholds academia to recognise the importance of preparing doctoral graduates for wider employability. The Academy's Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) found that research students rated career and personal development planning less positively than other aspects of their doctoral programmes. Less that 40% of them agreed that they were 'encouraged to think about the range of career opportunities that are available' or to reflect on their career development needs.

Research training and employability are not mutually exclusive. Empowering researchers to take ownership of their personal and professional development is entirely consistent with research degree programmes aims to develop independent, autonomous researchers who are capable of producing original research.

A number of employability-related developments have taken place in UK higher education recently that have had impacts on research degree programmes. Arguably the most influential is the report by Sir Gareth Roberts, *SET for success: the supply of people with science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills* (HM Treasury, 2002). That report made several recommendations that relate to the development of employability in doctoral researchers, particularly in terms of embedding transferable skills training within research degree programmes. For researchers funded by the research councils, HEIs received additional funding to deliver skills development programmes.

The ethos of embedding skills development within research degree programmes has also been recognised by the Quality Assurance Agency in its revision of Section One of the *Code of practice* (QAA, 2004). The Code recognises that doctoral researchers 'need support to develop the research, subject specific, communication, and other skills they require to become effective researchers, to enhance their employability and assist their career progress after completion of their degree. Development and application of such skills is also understood to be significant in the research graduate's capability for sustaining learning throughout his or her career, whether in an academic role, or in other employment.'

Institutions have responded by creating more structured doctoral programmes, with more formalised requirements, responsibility and accountability, replacing an often-localised approach influenced by departmental practices and individual supervisors. The 'Roberts agenda' has catalysed significant growth in the quality, quantity and availability of development opportunities for researchers. At the same time, however, we have seen also a diversification in demographics and motivations of doctoral researchers, reflected in the growth of part-time and mature doctoral researchers.

Institutions now face considerable financial challenges, including the potential ending of the ring-fenced funding associated with the Roberts agenda. If the employability agenda is to move significantly forward for doctoral researchers and

ultimately to benefit the UK economy, HEIs face a serious challenge – they need to have a strategic, institution-wide approach that has commitment and responsibility at senior level and makes best use of limited resources and funding. Increasingly, HEIs are looking at ways in which to leverage limited funding, including exploring collaborations with other HEIs in their region.

However, given the individualistic nature of researchers and the need for people to take charge of their own learning throughout their lifetime, there is value in placing more ownership of training in the hands of the researcher. The current development of the Researcher Development Framework (RDF), led by Vitae on behalf of the sector, aims to be the underpinning framework for researcher development in UK HEIs. The RDF is a tool for planning, promoting and supporting the personal, professional and career development of researchers in higher education. It describes the knowledge, skills, behaviours and personal qualities of researchers and encourages researchers to aspire to excellence through achieving higher levels of development.

Although the RDF is primarily designed as a professional development tool for individual researchers, funders, HEIs and other organisations interested in developing researchers will find it useful when they reflect on their strategic approach to supporting researchers and associated provision.

As the 'skills agenda' matures HEIs are looking at more creative ways of providing development opportunities for doctoral researchers. The Vitae database of practice , containing over 600 examples of skills development practices within UK institutions, increasingly has examples of initiatives where researchers are taking responsibility for designing development activities and interventions (as Debbie McVitty describes in her article in this issue). These include designing and developing conferences, public engagement activities and social and economic entrepreneurship. There is encouraging evidence that the 'skills agenda' may transform the way doctoral researchers engage in the economy and society in terms of knowledge transfer, out-reach activities, entrepreneurship and ultimately social and economic impact. The work of the Impact and Evaluation Group (previously the Rugby Team) is identifying further evidence of the value and impact of developing researchers' skills and the benefits to their employability.

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A number of the recommendations of the Smith Report relate directly to skills development and employability, including those which expect HEIs "to be more pro-active in providing postgraduates with the opportunity to develop the core competencies they need to succeed in a competitive job market" (para 18), to "ensure that transferable skills training is embedded as standard in the funding and design of all postgraduate research programmes" (para 19) and to "work closely with Vitae, employers and other stakeholders to provide better information, advice and guidance on career choices for postgraduate research students" (para 19). Other recommendations focus on establishing "employer needs for postgraduate skills" (para 30) and identifying "how and where to fund provision that responds to employer needs for postgraduate skills" (para 34).

THE POSTGRADUATE
TAUGHT EXPERIENCE SURVEY

CHRIS PARK AND PAM WELLS
DISCUSS RESULTS AND THE WAY AHEAD

Building on the success of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), the Academy has developed the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) to find out what taught postgraduate students think about their learning experiences. Taken together, the results of these two surveys start to build a clear picture of the views of postgraduate students in the UK. By also including appropriate questions from the National Student Survey (NSS), PTES allows students' views on some important themes to be tracked as they progress up the ladder of higher education qualifications.

PTES is an online survey, completed anonymously by students, and institutions own their own results. There is a core question set, and institutions can add their own questions if they wish to. Participating institutions can view in real-time online their own results, aggregate sector-level results and results from benchmarking groups, and y can also download their own results for further analysis.

Informed by a small pilot in 2007–08, the first national administration of PTES took place in the academic year 2008–09. Thirty HEIs took part, with a total of 14,421 students expressing their views. Demographic analyses of participant data showed a broad similarity between PTES respondents and HESA statistics for the taught postgraduate population as a whole.

The analysis of PTES results at the sector level focuses on the core questions, based on nine main areas (scales) – motivations, quality of teaching and learning, assessment and feedback, dissertation, organisation and management, learning resources, skills and personal development, career and professional development, and overall satisfaction.

Sector-level findings relating to teaching and learning and assessment and feedback received, respectively, the highest and lowest average ratings in PTES 2009. This sector-level pattern averages out the variations between individual HEIs, which may well have rather different results in particular areas of the survey. The ability for an institution to compare its results with the sector-level results, and with benchmarking groups of its choice, is designed to help it to identify its relative strength and weaknesses, and thus target appropriate enhancement initiatives.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Starting with the best news, the teaching and learning scale contained the most positively-rated questions in the whole survey. The findings show that, overall, HEIs are providing an effective student learning experience, with 84% of students agreeing that their taught postgraduate course is intellectually stimulating, 83% agreeing that staff are good at explaining things and enthusiastic about what they are teaching, and 81% agreeing that the teaching and learning methods for their type of programme are effective. The lowest-scoring item in this scale is the amount of contact time students receive to support effective learning, with only 67% agreeing that they have sufficient face-to-face and/or virtual/online contact time. Staff accessibility and teaching support were also rated relatively poorly, with 71% of students agreeing that staff are available/accessible when needed and 71% agreeing that they receive adequate support from staff on their course.

Although students tend to be very satisfied with their courses, the skills of their teachers, and the teaching and learning methods used on their programmes, they feel that their learning experience would be improved by increasing the availability of staff, and by increased support and contact time.

ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

At the other end of the spectrum, the assessment and feedback scale contained the least positively-rated questions in PTES 2009, with average student agreement levels being in the order of 10% lower than for the teaching and learning scale. Overall, students were relatively satisfied with the fairness and clarity of assessment, with 74% agreeing that the criteria used in marking have been made clear in advance and 74% agreeing that assessment arrangements and marking have been fair. Sixty-eight percent of students agreed that they had received detailed written or oral comments on their work. However, students were considerably less satisfied in terms of the usefulness of the feedback they received, with only 58% agreeing that feedback on their work helped them to clarify things they did not understand, 57% agreeing that feedback had been prompt, and 57% agreeing that they received feedback in time to improve their next assignment.

While it is clearly important for students to receive detailed and helpful formative comments on their work, it is also essential that they receive such feedback promptly. Students need to reflect on and learn from their feedback while the assessed piece of work is still fresh in their minds, and they need enough time for their learning to be assimilated and internalised before it must be demonstrated in their next assignment.

PTES also includes questions about the extent to which students' experiences met their expectations. The results overall were very positive. Assessment and feedback scored lowest in this area, with three quarters of respondents (74%) agreeing that assessment and feedback met or exceeded their expectations. Organisation and management of the programme met or exceeded the expectations of 76% of students, and the quality of learning and teaching met or exceeded the expectations of 82%. Learning resources and career and professional development met or exceeded the expectations of 86% of students, and skills and personal development met or exceeded the expectations of 89%.

In summary, an important headline message from PTES for the sector as a whole, and for individual HEIs, is that students are saying "keep up the good teaching, and give us even more access to it!"

In terms of assessment and feedback, the PTES results are comparable with those from the NSS – students want clearer feedback, and they want it quicker.

In terms of the future, the PTES 2010 survey is currently underway, with more than twice as many institutions participating this year as in 2009. A flexible survey period has been introduced to allow institutions to survey their students at a time that fits in more closely with their own taught programme schedules. The core questionnaire has been simplified and shortened slightly, informed by feedback from HEIs, with the aim of achieving more focused benchmarking criteria across the sector.

The current administration will form the first national comparison sample, and it will be informative to discover the similarities and differences between the first two full years of PTES. Two things to look forward to are the extent to which the results from a much larger sample of HEIs will echo those from PTES 2009, and what evidence will emerge to inform enhancement of the taught postgraduate student experience, which the Academy plans to support during 2010–11.

Looking ahead, the Academy will run PRES and PTES in alternate years, so that each respective survey runs on a two-year cycle. This gives institutions time to interpret and respond to the survey results for their students in the year after each survey has run. The next national administration of PTES will take place in 2011–12, with PRES running in 2010–11.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Postgraduate survey work by the Academy www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/supportingresearch/postgraduatework

PTES 2009 Report www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/york/documents/ourwork/postgraduate/ptes2009report.pdf

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The Smith Report recommends that "the Teaching Quality Information steering group should consider extending the National Student Survey to include taught postgraduate students." (para 13)

THE MBA
STUDENT EXPERIENCE

ALISON KENNELL REFLECTS
ON A NEW LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Having been an undergraduate and then a postgraduate Masters' student at the same institution back in the early 1990s, I wasn't entirely sure what to expect as a part-time MBA student at a London-based higher education institution nearly 20 years later. Life has certainly become a lot more complex since I was last a student – juggling work, being a mum and various voluntary commitments, to name but a few – but oddly I feel better equipped both to cope with the demands of the programme and to get the most out of it. Such a long gap out of higher education (despite having worked in the sector) also brings into sharper relief what a privilege, and luxury, it is to have time to think.

One important difference in perspective that I am particularly conscious of is that 'student' is not a label that I feel comfortable with any more. In particular as a part-time, distance student, my interests lie wholly in the academic programme of study and not the wider experiences on offer to students through institutional or departmental affiliation. My professional identity also defines how I want to be treated on the MBA – as a peer with a great deal to learn from programme colleagues as well as from the

teaching team and with professional efficiency and courtesy by support services. My experiences to date reinforce my suspicions from working within higher education that whilst the teams delivering professional and part-time programmes such as MBAs clearly understand the needs and perspectives of their target markets, many parts of the university administration have yet to grasp fully the need to change the way they interact with today's students – for example in terms of student registration, finance and academic support services.

Much has changed in higher education in the last 20 years – not least a shift to an almost universal expectation on the part of students that assessment processes and criteria should be transparent. In this aspect at least, my own expectations as a student are no different – I want to be sure that I understand what is expected of me, that I will get timely feedback on assessed work that is transparently linked to grade descriptors and, crucially, that will enable me to improve. The MBA programme team has made particular efforts on this front, providing examples of assessed work and encouraging a dialogue on what marks such examples might have achieved. General

study skills including planning assignments, writing and referencing are also covered in much more detail than I recall from the sepia memories of my previous studies.

Despite the effort to incorporate such skills into the course, I have personally felt that they are much less relevant. I expect to be able to organise my own time, to have my own techniques to overcome writer's block, to seek help when I need it and to meet (or renegotiate) deadlines. I am also, I suspect, more realistic now about the extent to which it is possible to set out how to perform particular tasks or achieve a particular level of performance – there are no 'magic bullets' nor mechanistic processes to be followed that can guarantee results. Nevertheless, I still experienced a sense of anxiety when it came to submitting my first assignment – had I really understood what was expected at this institution, for this programme? Was what I had written sufficiently 'academic'? Did the assignment reflect my professional competence and would a poor grade undermine my professional self-esteem?

Programme colleagues on the MBA have added significantly to the richness of the programme. As well as providing 'real-life' material from a wide range of backgrounds relevant to the programme, they bring their own specialisms to discussions, be that as a manager in finance, human resources or an academic department. There is a strong sense of peer support that I suspect will last long after we have completed the programme.

Despite disagreeing with the notion of framing students as consumers, I constantly find myself thinking in terms of 'value for money', relative to the premium fees that are charged for such programmes. This raises expectations across the piece, including in terms of the expertise of contributors, and I find

myself exercising my consumer 'rights' by marking an occasional contributor harshly on feedback forms if I do not feel s/he represents the best in the sector. Conversely, I am also much more conscious of the importance of contributing to the learning experience (for both myself and others) and take my own responsibilities as a participant much more seriously than I did as an undergraduate or MA student – time is a more precious commodity these days and I, like my fellow participants, consciously seek a return on the investment we make in attending sessions. In completing assignments too, there is a conscious decision to choose tasks and reading that will enhance professional skills and knowledge, rather than going for 'easy options' that play to existing strengths.

In idle moments, I wonder what the programme team makes of us as a cohort and how much we are both like and unlike other groups of students. I suspect that, as indicated in some of these reflections, we can be both stimulating co-participants in the production of knowledge and demanding (and occasionally irritating!) consumers.

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BEYOND
THE PhD

CATHERINE REYNOLDS AND DAVID STANBURY ON THE DOCTORAL RESEARCHERS' EXPERIENCE

Currently, around 1,000 UK graduates every year complete a PhD in an arts and humanities subject. Almost 50% of them do not continue to work in education, so how does their PhD prepare them for diverse work roles outside the academy? Some of the very different experiences of studying for a doctorate in the arts and humanities are described on a new web resource, 'Beyond the PhD'.

www.beyondthephd.co.uk hosts searchable audio interviews with 28 former postgraduates charting individual career journeys through the PhD and into various work roles. Autonomous users can reflect on and learn from these narratives as they continue to develop their own.

Individuals frame and make meaning of their doctoral experience and we hear how these meanings develop into the work context. We learn in some cases about how activity fundamental to the PhD is relevant to employment in some sectors. For Chris and Sophie, working in the National Audit Office and House of Commons respectively, research ability and critical thinking are fundamental:

"This organisation requires and relies on high quality research and whose reputation is only as robust as its ability to reach robust conclusions that stand up to scrutiny by the media and by parliament. There is an emphasis on innovative methodologies …"

"There is a lot of research, a lot of collating material and thinking critically … So critical thinking and questions that you might want to ask to tease out holes in policy … I definitely think I am better at doing this job than I would have been if I hadn't done a PhD."

Despite some direct connections between PhD experience and new environments, the transitions have sometimes been turbulent while the new role evolves. Adam, now working in a government agency, advises:

"If you're thinking of a career outside academia like I have, don't be afraid. You have to dig a little bit deeper sometimes, I think, to try to see how you could adapt."

The audio approach gives the narrative an intimate quality while allowing anonymity; the result is that you hear a real person talking frankly.

Employers' attitudes to applicants with a PhD in an arts and humanities subject are encouraging: Liz, working in the heritage industry, says:

> "My employers were pleased to get me for the job because for them it signals that we've got someone of quite significant calibre who's capable, who's got research skills, presentation skills, and all of that."

We hear about the value of the PhD in different parts of the labour market and about how individuals feel about their different roles shifting and changing as their identity develops. Sarah, a freelance writer, explains:

> "My current role is incredibly varied, I work freelance and I've only just had the confidence to say that I am a writer, but that's what I do. I have submitted my first book, it is with a publisher at the moment and that publisher has just commissioned me to write a second one, which is very exciting. I am writing for magazines, I do a bit of TV work … it has been extremely important to know people that I met during my PhD because some of them have put work my way."

Joanne in publishing:

> "I'm bringing a kind of intellectual background with me … Another thing, from the PhD is an attitude, I wanted a job like my PhD that interested me beyond it just being a job."

Liz tries to articulate how her PhD experience transformed her, while acknowledging that this cannot be quantified:

> "The experience changes you and, I know myself, it changed me for the better; it made me a more capable employee; it made me more confident in my own abilities … It's hard to quantify quite how much difference postgraduate research makes to you."

John, with a PhD in Classics, now working in information technology says:

> "It's very hard to give a specific instance where having a PhD has changed how I approach something; it informs everything I do."

The audio narratives deserve close attention and the site also features video discussions and articles about life after the PhD for these very employable postgraduates. This material can illuminate and challenge current pedagogic and policy debates about the impact of doctoral study. It is also a useful resource for staff developers, supervisors and careers advisers working with groups of postgraduates considering their careers and making meaning of their experiences.

FURTHER INFORMATION

All quotes are taken from www.beyondthephd.co.uk.

What do researchers do? First destinations of doctoral graduates by subject. Analysis of first employment destinations of doctoral graduates 2003–2007 from UK Universities by discipline and subject. Vitae www.vitae.ac.uk/cms/files/upload/vitae-wdrd-by-subject-jun-09.pdf

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DAVID STANBURY is Joint Director of the Centre for Career Management Skills at the University of Reading.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH

JANET BOHRER OUTLINES THE QAA'S FOCUS ON POSTGRADUATE RSEARCH

I was delighted when I was asked to write an article for Academy Exchange about the work of the Quality Assurance Agency for higher education (QAA) and postgraduate research. It provided me with a great opportunity to write about some of the other work we do at QAA that isn't institutional audit. It is also an opportunity to highlight how important it is for us at QAA to work with organisations that have similar interests to ours in postgraduate research education.

I'd like to draw your attention to the current QAA evaluation of the Academic Infrastructure. Many of you will of course know that the term 'Academic Infrastructure' is one used by QAA to cover a set of UK-wide nationally agreed reference points. These reference points give higher education providers a shared starting point for setting, describing and assuring the quality of the learning experience and standards of higher education awards or programmes which include research degrees. There are four components to the Academic Infrastructure: the frameworks for higher education qualifications, subject benchmark statements, programme specifications and the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*. The Code has ten sections, each of which covers a different topic. Section one is for postgraduate research programmes. The evaluation is not specifically about postgraduate research or about how we might revise section one of the Code but your views about how the Academic Infrastructure generally might be changed are very important. We would like to include the views from the postgraduate research community as part of the evaluation. Further details and a discussion paper can be found at www.qaa.ac.uk/news/media/pressreleases/250210.asp.

As well as the *Code of practice* another component of the Academic Infrastructure is the frameworks for higher education qualifications. (There are two for England, Wales and Northern Ireland and one for Scotland.) Postgraduate research qualifications are included in these frameworks which provide UK institutions with a reference point in determining the relative levels of their awards including doctorates. Following the Academy project on Redefining the doctorate (Park, 2007) and a national conference in 2008, QAA were asked to take a lead in furthering discussions about

the nature of the doctorate that might provide additional guidance to these doctoral descriptors. QAA convened a doctoral characteristics working group to explore the nature of 'doctorateness' and jointly hosted a discussion event with the University of Reading Graduate School in January 2010. As a result a paper has been written *Doctorateness – an elusive concept?* by Pam Denicolo (University of Reading) and Chris Park (higher education consultant), edited by Janet Bohrer (QAA) and Gill Clarke (University of Bristol).

This paper explores the changing nature of doctoral education in the UK, and poses some important questions about what might be meant by the term 'doctorateness', the quality that at least in principle all doctoral awards (of all types and in all disciplines) should have in common and all doctoral candidates should be able to demonstrate. The paper also identifies some of the challenges of reconciling current modes of assessing doctorates with this elusive notion of 'doctorateness' and it finishes by considering the increasingly international nature of UK doctoral education. The paper and the notes from the meeting in January will shortly be available on the QAA website in a new area dedicated to the doctoral qualification, accessed from the Academic Infrastructure page www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/default.asp.

Later this year QAA are planning to reconvene the doctoral characteristic working group which working with the National Union of Students will

produce a 'rough guide' about UK doctorates aimed at potential research students.

Other future work is likely to be influenced by Professor Adrian Smith's review of postgraduate education for the Department of Business Innovation and Skills. At the end of 2009 QAA contributed a submission to the review and at the time of writing we are waiting for the publication of his recommendations.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information about postgraduate research work at QAA, please contact j.bohrer@qaa.ac.uk.

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The Smith Report recommends that "HEIs should work with the QAA to overcome any perceived barriers to quality assuring flexible postgraduate provision delivered partly in the workplace or by more than one HEI" (para 36), and that "the QAA should continue to work with HEIs to ensure that UK postgraduate education delivered overseas maintains its international reputation for rigour and quality" (para 43).

PREPARING FUTURE ACADEMICS

KAREN CLEGG LOOKS AT A PROGRAMME THAT PREPARES RESEARCH STUDENTS FOR TEACHING

The Preparing Future Academics (PFA) Programme has been in operation at the University of York since 2007 and to date 90 PhD students have enrolled. PFA attracts research students who are looking for a qualification in teaching with a view to pursuing an academic career. All students are allocated a PFA supervisor from a cognate discipline who supports their progress. The assessment for the programme is designed to reflect academic practice and to provide an opportunity for students to develop their own teaching style in a safe and supported environment. Assessed work includes: session plans, teaching observations, reflective logs, and a presentation on an aspect of pedagogy.

The strong reputation of the programme among the student community means that we had to turn down applicants for 2009/10. The assessment is deliberately designed to be work-based and to authentically reflect the activities the postgraduates who teach are engaged in. Students appear to appreciate this, saying, "the documents (reflective logs etc.) required were well worth writing and a good form of assessment … I also really liked the symposium."

As part of the portfolio students also have to complete an overall reflection on their development as postgraduates who teach. An example of this comes from a final year student who says; "I have thoroughly enjoyed undertaking the PFA programme. I relished the interaction of the GTU sessions and the opportunity to mix with and share ideas with peers who were also developing as 'educators' and just starting out on their teaching careers." Students who have successfully completed the programme said that the best things were: "Reflecting on the teaching and the lesson plans I will use again this year. The observations were really valuable. Great for the nervous/inexperienced/not-very-confident teacher!"

The majority of students take the PFA course in the second year of their PhD studies and are therefore not in a position to immediately apply for jobs, even so a number have gone on to secure academic posts at UK universities, including the University of York. Students use the accredited programme as a way of bolstering their CV and providing evidence of commitment to an academic career. One student who has successfully completed the programme explained: "In my interview I had to deliver a presentation on how my research informs my teaching

and I found that the material I had covered on the PFA course was crucial in helping me prepare for what turned out to be a successful presentation.''

The programme was formally recognised by the Higher Education Academy in March 2008 enabling those postgraduates who teach who successfully complete the programme to apply to become Associates of the Academy. The programme was described by the Academy accreditor as 'exemplary, groundbreaking and innovative'.

The postgraduates who teach programmes not only help our research students but provide a continuing development opportunity for the academic staff who contribute to our courses and who take on the role of PFA. One PFA supervisor explains, ''Participating in PFA as a supervisor is like undertaking my own annual refresher course, it not only helps me reflect upon my own teaching practice but it also keeps me striving for continual improvement as I read and hear about evolving pedagogic theory. I always learn something new every year that I try and implement.'' The value of the experience is echoed by other PFA supervisors who said; ''… the supervision process allows for some very human, and very honest and open, conversations about

teaching practice. These conversations between so-called 'experienced' and 'inexperienced' practitioners create space for some rich and unexpected learning to take place. My experiences of supervising PFA students have made me a better, and more thoughtful, practitioner and much better at putting together my own seminar plans''.

I hope that the training we provide for PhD students will have positive impact not only on the teaching and learning at the University of York, but throughout the HE sector, within and beyond the UK. As the Chair of the university's Standing Committee on Assessment and a PFA supervisor observes; ''It is professionally run and benefits not only the research students who study on the programme but also their future students for when the PFA students become academics themselves. In this way, the PFA programme has influence far beyond the walls of the University of York.''

DR KAREN CLEGG is PFA Programme Director and Director of Graduate Training at the University of York.

FOLLOWING
THE TRAIL

IMELDA WHELEHAN ON

SUPERVISING PhD STUDENTS IN AN AUDIT CULTURE

I'm currently supervising five PhD students: one is a retired teacher with no plans to enter academia; another is a writer whose interests traverse the theoretical and the creative – her novel will be part of the final submission; one has been awarded a university bursary and is required to complete to target, one is a self-funded full-timer and my most recent acquisition received AHRC funding in the open round. Three have clear academic career ambitions, one has no wish to work again and one – well, her part-time work could expand to utilise her skills in the wider marketplace if she failed to take up an academic post. They have little in common except the audit trail which follows them through the university.

I'm not anti audits: I remember only too well how ad hoc supervision arrangements were for my generation. I often had meetings in my tutor's house. No records taken were kept, but luckily my supervisor was conscientious and talented. Some of my peers weren't so lucky and were left chasing academics who remained mysteriously absent.

Today's PhD students are different: if they have research council or university bursaries they've already been scrutinised, interviewed and have presented research plans and schedules; registration documents encourage them to risk assess, predict their thesis findings, anticipate ethical issues and ensure their training needs have, or will be, met.

They have acknowledged that research requires 'skills' and they will have reflected on diverse methodological approaches. By their second year they may be actively seeking teaching experience, presenting conference papers and sourcing journals for publication; and listservs and other web-based resources alert them to the latest developments and debates in their fields. They were frighteningly knowledgeable about the RAE, have already boned up on the REF and keep abreast of funding initiatives.

A good deal of these labours will involve my input, directly or indirectly. My office is a litter of post-its reminding me to assess training, update my supervisory skills, conduct reviews, prove I have regular supervisory meetings and finally devise a mock viva. I sometimes think I spend more effort trying to refine a registration document than I do

pitching my latest book to a publisher – but I'm less likely to get a referral from the latter. I guess for the student who wishes to continue in higher education it gives them an insight into a major aspect of the average academic's life, but what of those who have other ambitions?

I'm not sure this is by design, but I think the pressures of accountability would harden anyone to the 'real' world. Whereas I felt that if I didn't get an academic post I'd be unemployable, the training research students receive forces them to reflect on what skills they have and are developing; they have to work to deadlines and (in my institution at least) they have to present their research and are encouraged to exploit different formats, including the poster and the blog.

These internet-savvy individuals want to have access to your virtual universe rather than your living room, and the VLE allows us to share documents, log meetings and debate without clogging up inboxes. One can argue about falling standards among the postgraduate population, but you cannot deny that they are better fitted to perform in any sphere that requires finely-honed

skills of multiple format communication, analysis, project evaluation, planning, time management and verbal and written expression. If only I'd had that kind of training … Maybe it would help me keep up to date with these audit forms…

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TEACHING
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

JANETTE RYAN CONSIDERS THE ISSUES
FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS STUDYING
AT POSTGRADUATE LEVEL IN THE UK

Increasing student mobility and national policies to recruit international students have changed the landscape in many UK universities. International students in the UK mostly enrol in postgraduate courses and comprise the majority of full-time students in postgraduate taught courses (although only 12% of undergraduates). Overall, they account for 33.4% of all postgraduate students, 66% of full-time postgraduates, 42% of taught course postgraduates, 50% of full-time research degree students and 43% of all research postgraduates (HESA statistics: www.ukcisa.org.uk/about/statistics_he.php).

International students bring rich knowledge, skills and worldviews as they live and work alongside local students and teaching staff but they do need support to adapt to new learning contexts and conventions, especially if their learning is intensified in a one-year Masters course. Equally, teaching staff need support in meeting the needs of both their international and local students and a more diverse student population.

According to the UK Higher Education International Unit (*International Focus Issue 39* June 2009), there are 513,570 international students in the UK (about one in every five students), giving it the second highest number of international students after the US, with students from China the single largest group. The UK is the most favoured destination for international students (although the US takes more) and this is driven by choice of university and its reputation rather than simple choice of country. This number is set to increase further, with UCAS this year reporting a 22.9% increase in applications for higher education places by international students.

International students therefore can no longer be simply regarded as a 'minority' group within higher education. They are part of a larger globalisation project and should be seen as an asset for universities and home students to learn about and connect with the world, and to provide opportunities for the generation of a more pluralistic body of knowledge and new ways of working.

Despite reporting general satisfaction with their overall experiences in the UK, however, international students do report dissatisfaction with several aspects of their teaching and learning experiences. Many academics also report that they experience difficulty working with students who bring unfamiliar expectations and experiences and feel unprepared for these changes and challenges.

Although the iGraduate International Student Barometer surveys show that overall, international students are relatively satisfied with their experiences at UK universities, more qualitative research (Carroll & Ryan, 2005; Jones, 2009; Montgomery, 2010) reveals areas of concern reported by international students to do with teaching and learning. These include:

— unclear expectations about the requirements of teaching and learning in the UK;
— a lack of background knowledge generally and in the discipline area;
— language issues, especially at the beginning of their study, and for postgraduates, especially in relation to the large amounts of reading required;
— the requirements of academic writing in the UK;
— assessment issues (where methods and criteria are unfamiliar); and
— difficulty participating and making friends with home students.

CHALLENGES FOR POSTGRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Although other students may struggle with the issues outlined above, these are intensified for international students. Postgraduate study, especially if it's research-only, can be a very lonely experience for any student but it is much more so for international students. They are far from home, in an unfamiliar environment, and perhaps operating in a language that is not their first. The intense nature of Masters by research study is made even more intense as the student is trying to cope with adaptation and change on many levels.

Unlike home students, international students don't have the same network of supports to draw upon such as family and friends and they may not be aware of other types of support available. Masters students need to 'hit the ground running' as their studies are compressed into perhaps nine months of intensive work. This means that they need support from their supervisors and others to ensure that they can be as successful as possible and as quickly as possible. Supervisors play a crucial role so it's important that they understand the support that international students may need or be expecting and the issues that might be difficult for them. International postgraduate students who speak positively about their study experiences in the UK frequently mention the importance of understanding and support from their lecturers and supervisors.

International students often report that their biggest disappointment is returning home without making any local friends during their stay. This can be particularly hard for postgraduate students, who tend to stay for shorter periods, and are generally in contact with fewer other students. For research-only students, their academic supervisor is often the only person with whom they have regular contact. Many report that they are unprepared for the isolation and independence of postgraduate study in the UK, expect more guidance and direction, may lack previous training in specific research and learning skills, and sometimes experience difficulties with their teachers or supervisors due to unclear expectations about the student-staff relationship in the UK. It is clear that overall international students do achieve well academically and are successful; however, they need the right support from their lecturers and supervisors to ensure this.

The international student market is highly competitive and dependent on perceptions of quality and reputation, so the positive experiences of international students play a major role in maintaining this flow. 'Word of mouth' reports by students returning home play a significant role in perceptions of quality and reputation. International students report that the single most important reason for their studies in the UK is to obtain an academic qualification. It is imperative that university academic staff receive training and support to enable them to achieve this. It is also imperative that curriculum and pedagogy are relevant to the changing needs of both international graduates and home students who will be living and working in a more interconnected world.

To respond to these needs and imperatives, the Academy joined forces with the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) to launch a two-year project called 'Teaching International Students' which is funded by the Academy and the Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI2). The aims of the 'Teaching International Students' initiative are to:

1. raise the profile of teaching and learning for international students;
2. establish a repository of resources and research about teaching international students;
3. identify and disseminate information and guidance;
4. provide guidance on staff development;
5. establish a network of interested people.

The project aims to build a 'community of practice' where dilemmas and difficulties are aired and where ideas and examples of successful teaching and learning practices in a range of contexts are shared. The project provides a resource bank with a discussion of major issues and suggestions for action, and points to further resources and research.

The project has only just started and needs to draw more on existing expertise and experiences of both staff and students. If you would like to participate in this project by suggesting a resource, hosting a joint event or contributing a case story about your own experiences and ideas, please contact: internationalisation@heacademy.ac.uk.

For further information about supervision of international students and the Teaching International Students project, see www.heacademy.ac.uk/internationalstudents.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Carroll, J. & Ryan, J. (2005). (Eds.). *Teaching international students: Improving learning for all.* London: Routledge.

Jones, E. (2009). *Internationalisation and the student voice.* London: Routledge.

Montgomery, C. (2010) *Understanding the international student experience: Universities into the 21st Century.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

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